Unbecoming Subjects

Subject Formation and Responsibility
in the Context of Judith Butler's Thinking

vorgelegt von

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Table of Contents

Approaching Subject Matters

Why the subject? Why subject formation? Why subject formation and responsibility? Why Judith Butler? What does it mean to begin with these questions and not with others? It is necessary to begin, one way or another. But this beginning will never be the actual beginning—the story has long begun. The beginning can only become the beginning belatedly. The beginning always comes too late. And the beginning—or, rather, the choice of where to begin—remains irrecuperably contingent, insofar as there is no absolute or necessary beginning for such a study. Yet where one begins and how one begins does matter, as it crucially sets the path for the entire study and traverses it. The question "why" puts us on a very different path than the question "how." "Why" and "how" both operate as addresses, demanding responses, and by doing so they also enable the emergence of theoretical inquiries. But they operate differently in implying and delimiting how responses must perform in order to work as adequate responses. "Why" seems to address by calling into question the validity and value of a certain inquiry and seems to set us up for a response that will somehow justify why the subject, why subject formation, why subject formation and responsibility, and why Butler. What, then, would happen if we began instead with these questions: How the subject? How subject formation? How subject formation and responsibility? How Butler? How to theorize subject formation and responsibility? How to read Butler? To ask "how" interrupts and suspends the demand for justification of a theory's or theorist's value. To offer a response that begins with "because" remains at odds with the desires the "how" has voiced. This does not mean that one might not or ought not in the end have reason or reasons to turn away from particular theories or theorists and to turn to others. In undertaking the encounter that is prompted by the question how to read this or that particular theory or theorist, the interest propelling the inquiry becomes that of finding out what it means to read them and how to read them productively. Reading someone then means finding ourselves addressed, allowing ourselves be addressed by thoughts and questions, listening and deferring a rash response, and letting beliefs, values, and predilections be called into question and opened up. And so alongside the question

"how" has emerged the question of what it means to do something, to ask questions in a specific way, to think a thought in a certain way.

What does it mean to read Butler as theorist of subject formation and responsibility? It might mean disrupting the association of her work as that almost exclusively dedicated to feminist and queer theory. As Sara Salih points out in her introduction to Judith Butler in Routledge's Critical Thinkers Series, Butler's thinking is mostly thought of in terms of "gender" and "gender performativity." But Salih is quick to emphasize that it is not quite that easy to categorize Butler and her thinking quite so neatly and that such an attempt would be in fact "an endeavour which would work against the Butlerian grain, if there is one" (2).[1] To call for reading Butler's thought as not only feminist or queer is not to deny Butler's importance for these fields and in her influence in initiating a wide theoretical and political discourse far beyond the boundaries of these fields on questions of sex, gender, sexuality and other identity categories, as well as on questions of identity politics more generally.[2] The attempt here is also not to defend Butler as a philosopher or theorist of the subject and to prove her significance for philosophy of the subject and moral philosophy. The intention with which this study sets out is to ask what happens when one engages carefully and rigorously with Butler's work, interrogating its offers to thinking about subject formation and responsibility. The hope of this study is that it will allow us to read for and engage with the ways in which Butler's thinking might make theorizing the subject and responsibility by undergoing productive crises and transformations.

If we begin to think about the questions of subject formation and responsibility and ask about the nexus between them, one way of approaching is to think about the root of responsibility as response. The question of responding is ethical at its core and brings about the subject as an "ethical agent" insofar as the demand of a response is

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[1] Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002). Interestingly, this remark is part of the introductory chapter entitled "Why Butler?" For an interview touching on a wide range of Butler's thinking see Judith Butler, "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham, *JAC* 20.4 (2000): 727-765.

[2] *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) are perhaps the most famous and influential books by Butler on these subjects. Even in her later work, Butler has certainly not turned away from questions of sex, gender, and sexuality, but has continued to engage with them in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000) and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

not neutral, not that of merely bringing up the question of how to respond; rather, this question of how to respond is that of how to respond *well*. The questions "how to respond" and "how to respond well" imply that there is an "I" that I come to speak, to take up, as I realize the "how to respond" to mean "how ought *I*, how should *I*, how can *I* respond?" The presupposition thus is that there is an I who is possibly able to find herself responsible, who comes to take up this I in connection with realizing that she should respond in this or that certain way. But prior to the emergence of this subject, there has to have been an address for a response to be possible at all. It is impossible for the I to recollect or reconstruct this scene of being addressed, to grasp that which has been addressing it and the content of this address, because it is necessarily only arriving belatedly on the stage. The I finds itself addressed by others, by social norms and rules, by demands that come upon it and that it could not choose nor of which it could possibly ever gain full knowledge. The addressing other has always already left; there is no time in which the I and the other, the demand and the I, had been contemporaneous. The subject emerges as addressed and demanded to respond, and the other and the message have already in some important way been lost. Yet this does not mean that there are no differences between the different ways and situations of becoming responsible, between the different responsibilities that emerge. The irrecoverability of the subject's pre-history means that it is impossible to deduce or develop a single conclusive theory of the subject and responsibility so that, in the attempt to theorize the subject and responsibility, there will always be a point where theorizing becomes speculation and the theorist more a poet than a scientist of philosophy.[3] To be unable to know with full certainty, then, does not do away with differences, but rather returns us to them and urges us to attend carefully to them and the ways in which they may be intertwined. In thinking about subject formation and responsibility, we, then, will have to consider the differences between becoming

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[3] Butler argues this point in her *Adorno Lectures:* "[T]hat there is no final or adequate narrative reconstruction of the prehistory of the speaking 'I' does not mean we cannot narrate it. It only means that at the moment when we narrate we become speculative philosophers or fiction writers" (*AL* 87; the second sentence, however, is omitted in the German translation and is solely part of the unpublished English manuscript). Judith Butler, *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); to be published as *Against Ethical Violence* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004). Page references are given to the published German translation; the quotations are taken directly from the English manuscript.

responsible by, to, and for another person and becoming responsible by, to, before, and for norms, rules, and laws.

But insofar as we understand responsibility as formed through being addressed and demanded to respond, then to be responsible is bound up, on the one hand, with the questions "who am I?" and "who am I to answer to that other?" as well as, on the other hand, with the questions of "who or what is this other?," "where is this other?," and "what is that to which I am to respond and to respond well?" For these questions to become available to the I, however, means that the other is not utterly and absolutely lost. The I still must be in a certain relation to that other that is demanding a response and seducing the subject to respond, although this does not mean that there necessarily needs to be full reflective awareness and self-knowledge for there to be responsibility. In order to inquire into subject formation and responsibility, it is thus necessary to consider the emergence of the subject in relation to these others and of the various dimensions of the addresses and of the addressing other. In Butler's work, the most explicitly and sustained inquiry into responsibility and the other as an other person—and into ethical theory in general—can be found in her *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (*Critique of Ethical Violence*), three lectures given as *Adorno Lectures* at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt am Main in 2002. Even so, the formation of the subject in response to being summoned and as entangled with norms and rules that labor on the body and psyche is a thread that runs through all of Butler's work and finds its most systematic engagement with regard to the role of norms, regulations, and power in *Psychic Life of Power*.[4]

Since emergence and development are constitutively part of one's becoming a subject, it is impossible to understand subject and subjectivity as someone or something that one is and always already possesses, as transcendentals of one's existence. At the same time, this development is not a kind of progression towards perfection or a progression in which the past, as one moves into the future, is overcome and left behind. Nor is this becoming, this continuous formation, a process that is ever readily available and transparent to the subject in recollection and reflection. The subject that emerges is one that always remains vulnerable, transient,

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[4] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).

and emergent—all at the same time. If human beings in their becoming remain inevitably precarious, "subject" and "subjectivity" as concepts cannot be captured as static notions or positions that one enters at some point of one's life and that provide a fairly safe harbor from there on. The lasting elusiveness and preliminarity of becoming a subject must have an epistemological impact on our theories of the subject and subjectivity. One attempt to attend to this inexorable vulnerability, transience, and emergence in theorizing is to think about the subject through *subject formation.*

This becoming is not happening in a space prior to social conditions, but through frameworks structured and traversed by social norms. The question of subject formation and how subject formation is theorized, then, is not primarily unrelated to political questions, because who gets to be a subject and how subjects get to be delimits the field of intelligibility and determines what can and cannot appear as legitimate political demands and issues. Insofar as subject formation is constitutively bound up with ethical and political questions, such a recasting of the subject in terms of subject formation will have to have consequences for thinking about ethics and politics as well. At the same time, this intertwinement of subject formation with questions of the political and the ethical demands that subject formation reflects on what it means that the relations between subjects and their self-relation emerges through political and ethical reflection and action. This does not, then, by necessity mean that theorizing subject formation is to prescribe what these subjects and their political and ethical actions ought to look like. Rather, the question that comes to the fore with exigency here is the question of how to theorize. What does it mean to offer a theoretical account of subject formation? Of the ways in which subject formation and responsibility are bound up with each other? What roles and agencies does theory acquire, what roles and agencies is it able and allowed to acquire, which roles and agencies are foreclosed? What are our expectations of theory, and what purposes do we ascribe to it? Theory as reflecting, inquiring, and unearthing problematics comes to interrupt practice—our practices—and to dislodge our predilections. And it is this interruption that is crucial for the critical potential of theory and that is core to Butler's thinking and writing.

But insofar as this kind of thinking is a dislodging of one's own position and practices, thinking is precisely not a merely intellectual exercise. This kind of theorizing thus is a critical practice that is critical also and important insofar as it is

risky for the one doing and undergoing it: "The questioning of taken-for granted conditions becomes possible on occasion, but one cannot get there through a thought-experiment, an *epoché*, an act of will. One gets there, as it were, through suffering the dehiscence, the breakup, of the ground itself" ("Is Kinship Always Heterosexual?" 19).[5] It is through the experience of this ungrounding that theorizing as critique becomes a mode of being and thinking that is very different from fault-finding.[6] The practical and political question and potential, then, lies in the mobilization of these dehiscences and breakages, in coming to decide how to react to those shattered grounds and to that which emerges as possible. This mobilization of the breakages means, from the perspective of the subject, to take a stance towards those breakages and the possibilities that come to emerge. The task of theory as critical practice and critical of practice, then, is not to make these decisions for us or to offer us recipes for decision-making. But the task of theory is very much to reflect on these decisions and their meanings, and for a theory of subject formation, the task is to reflect on how this coming to decide and having to respond figures the relationship among ethics, politics, and subject formation. The issues that have to be negotiated and renegotiated at these intersections emerge as questions regarding agency, responsibility, and accountability and its limits, questions regarding the ability to deliberate and what it means to come to understand oneself as oneself as well as to understand oneself in corporeal extension over time.

But what is it that becomes and emerges in subject formation? Individuals? Persons? Subjects? "I"s? Can these notions be delimited against each other? As I become aware of myself as myself, I become aware and emerge as what or whom

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[5] Judith Butler, "Is Kinship Always Heterosexual?," *differences*: *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13.1 (2002): 14-44.

[6] Patricia Purtschert argues critique as key to Butler's thinking in her insightful article "Macht der Kontingenz: Zu Judith Butlers Begriff der Kritik" (*Philosophinnen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Regine Munz [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, forthcoming]). Purtschert offers that for Butler "[c]ritique ... represents a permanent practice that interrogates the conditions of subject formation in the context of social power. On the one hand this leads to a critical reading of hegemonic subject positions, and on the other hand this leads to a thematizing of excluded forms of existence" (my translation). Most explicit on critique as "arts of existence" in Butler's own writing is her essay "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) 212-226. See also Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?" *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 191-211. Ungroundedness and contingency as crucial to critical practice already figures importantly in Butler's earlier works, among those the essay "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1990), 3-21.

exactly? As subject? As person? As human? As ...? Perhaps what happens here, as any possible answer fails to comprehensively or even satisfactorily circumscribe what or who I am, is the limits of our language to grasp and establish identity breaking open. "I am ..." ends up to always be a misfit—the name or story fails to capture that which it is to describe, circumscribe, and give flavor and texture. But it is through this failure that the names and stories bring us about as exceeding these names and stories and as living lives beyond these names and stories. These lives, however, are never completely separable and independent from those names and stories that exceed us in their histories, as well as from those others with whose stories and histories we remain and become entangled.

In this entanglement and the "uneasy life" under the various names, signs, and stories that one comes to live, the name of the "we" is not excluded from never quite fitting the I, which means that the I is not fully coextensive with or reducible to that we. Subject formation involves a certain individuation that is a certain separation and a becoming aware of a differentiation between self and other. There seems to be an awakening to otherness in emerging as "I." There can be no subject without the other and also never a full separation, if we understand subject formation as a mode of response, as a desiring to respond and to respond well. But to emerge in response, speaking the "I" also means necessarily to evacuate and emerge at a distance from the scene of being addressed, from the one addressing, and from the demands arriving through this address. To become as I means to emerge at a distance from the other, while being bound and beholden to this other without being able to fully know this other and the otherness of this other. There could be no I without this fundamental opacity, if otherness is constitutive of subjectivity and selfhood insofar as it is irreducible to the subject and beyond the control and auspices of the subject while touching and traversing this subject. If otherness were rendered fully unambiguous, then it would be returned fully under the control of the subject. The other thus must also remain ambiguous as a conceptual term in thinking about subject formation, but this does not mean that it is impossible to inquire into how precisely this ambiguity and unknowability comes to figure and operate. There is the otherness of an other person, as well as otherness as the norms and laws orchestrating subject formation. There is otherness as that which is and has to be excluded as other, which must remain unconscious and cannot be signified and recognized. Yet the body can also be that

which is other, an assertion that need not suggest a reinstitution of a Cartesian split. Rather, the body emerges as an other insofar as it is not reducible to the psyche, the unconscious, the social, or the material and insofar as it is possible to perceive and experience one's body reflectively as one's own body. Being able to reflect *on* something presupposes taking this something as an object, thus taking it as an other. The other furthermore can figure as the conscience of the subject, which is another distinct aspect of otherness, because it is experienced by the subject as "the voice of the Other within [oneself] ... which, of course *is* and *is not* the Other."[7] The task in this work will be to inquire how these dimensions of otherness bringing forth the subject as the unpacifiable (*unbefriedbar*) and unsatisfiable (*unbefriedigbar*) site of contestation.

As a process that is inevitably social, subject formation and hence also the incessantly emerging subject have to be historical, which means that they have to be extended over time and contingent in their being. If the character of the subject is historical, then as a self-conscious subject, the subject also has to become aware of itself as extended over time and having a history. This movement is initiated and repetitively sustained by the economy of passionate attachment to life in general that is a will and desire to be. If being now is willing and desiring, then in its most basic form, life is the desire to desire, the will to will. This passionate attachment to life renders human beings dependent on and vulnerable to the conditions of being. This desire to live is an easily exploitable desire, since, as Friedrich Nietzsche concludes in his *Genealogy of Morals*,[8] the longing to live and to get away from the incessant circle of transience and to find some rest is "*a will to nothingness*, an aversion [*Widerwillen*, counter-willing] to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is an remains a *will*! ... [M]an would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will ..." (*GM* 163/412).[9] The desire to live thus turns out to be an ambivalent attachment to

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[7] Interview with Judith Butler in *JAC* 20.4 (2000): 749.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Kritische Studienausgabe 5, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: DTV, 1999). Citations will be taken from the English translation *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). The references will be given to first the English edition and then to the page numbers in the German original.

[9] The German original here reads: "einen *Willen zum Nichts*, einen Widerwillen gegen das Leben, eine Auflehnung gegen die grundsätzlichsten Voraussetzungen des Lebens, aber es ist und bleibt ein *Wille*! ... [L]ieber will noch der Mensch *das Nichts* wollen, als *nicht* wollen ..." (*GM* 412).

life that renders the subject complicit in its dependency on and subjection to the conditions of its emergence by willing them. This ambivalence and exploitability of the passionate attachment to the conditions of one's being come to the fore in the example of the young child dependent on and passionately attached to its parents. As Butler emphasizes in the introduction to *Psychic Life of Power,* this attachment holds even—and especially—when it is not unconditional love and care that the child experiences. The child cannot but cling to the connection that is there with its parents, even if this bond is dysfunctional, and the more this connection is jeopardized, the more fiercely this connection is desired. The child cannot but will and desire the conditions of its own possibility.

Desire is the driving force in Butler's theory of subject formation and is understood as always intentional, in the phenomenological sense of having an object. No desire is simply desire; desire is always desire *of* or *for* something (see *SD* 25).[10] In our inquiring into becoming, desire emerges as reflexive and in this form is exposed as the modality of how the subject is constituted through the desire for overcoming otherness that—behind its own back—turns out to be desire for self-knowledge. However, since this desire remains bound up with the experience of alterity, and since—as the psychoanalytical inquiry into the conditions of subject formation exposes—desire as a mode of becoming self-conscious depends on the proliferation of alterity, the desire of the consciousness thus is unmasked as its own opacity. This desire is a desire that stems from an experience of a lack, namely, the lack of having oneself as another, which simultaneously is an overwhelming surplus, namely, that of too much of the other's otherness. The psychoanalytical account of subject formation highlights the role and economy of "desire" that emphasize and bring to the fore the dynamic of lack and desire as a lack of certainty and control that renders the subject fundamentally exposed to the dynamic of regulation and desire. For Butler, the economy of desire or "passionate attachment," as desire as a psychic function is denoted from *Psychic Life of Power* onwards, focuses on the aspect of the productive dialectic of regulation and desire, especially with regard to the production of the unconscious as necessary for the conscious and self-conscious subject to

emerge. The key notion in Butler's investigations into this process is her understanding of this process of subject formation as *assujetissement* (subjectivation) that captures the emergence of the subject through subjection. The process of becoming a subject is for Butler a process of becoming subordinated by power with power and of this subjection being the necessary condition for the existence of the subject. Butler understands power not only "as *forming* the subject," but also "as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire" (*PL* 2).

The form of this power is a "turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself" (*PL* 3); this dynamic is a passionate and violent turn that brings about the subject. Understood as a turn, this subjectivating movement is also referred to by Butler as a "tropological movement" (*PL* 3), a term she derives from rhetorical theory to denote the performative quality of this turn. "Turn" is the translation of the Old Greek term *tropos*, which in Koiné Greek means "way" or "manner" and in Classical Latin carries the meaning "metaphor" or "figure of speech," while in Late Latin it denotes "mood" and "measure."[11] Captured as a tropological movement that brings about the self-reflective subject, it is possible to emphasize the discursive as well as the metonymic character of this process that brings about a nonidentical subject. A trope, according to Hayden White's discussion in his *Tropics of Discourse*, "is always not only a deviation *from* one possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation *towards* another meaning" (2). With regard to subject formation, this means that the subjectivating turn implies an undoing of the subject since it is a turning of the subject *on* itself, while at the same time, the turn is not merely an unbecoming deviation undoing the subject, but it is productive by bringing forth the subject in the mode of deviation that is a mode of irrecoverable nonidentity.

Subject formation as a tropological movement understands self-consciousness as produced in its turning on itself; however, since this turning is precisely the process of the emergence of the subject, there is no subject prior to the turn that is then making the turn. In Butlerian terms, this movement reveals the paradox of referentiality in

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[10] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

[11] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978). See also Butler's reference to White and own explanation of her use of "tropological" in *Psychic Life of Power* (*PL* 201-2 n. 1).

subjection because of the necessity to refer to that which does not yet exist, namely, the subject, and "the turn appears to function as a tropological inauguration of the subject, a founding moment whose ontological status remains permanently uncertain" (*PL* 2-3). Subjectivation thus carries connotations both of being rendered a subject and being subjected. This becoming subject can only happen through being addressed by others, by demands, norms, and rules. As Butler explains in her *Adorno Lectures,* what seems to be a closed dyadic encounter between two persons is always already implicated in, opened up towards, and traversed by the social frameworks of power structures, norms, and rules.[12] The words, the gestures, and practices—in general, the language that we come to use is not ours, is not ours to safeguard it against its histories and social frameworks; language works only because it radically exceeds us. I cannot but live a perilous life, vulnerable to others, to the social, to myself, but it is this very openness and not only the possibility of encounters but the reality of encounters that is the condition of this I's emergence and life. We are not without having been touched and addressed, but we are never reducible to and instead always already exceed the relations, names, norms, and stories through which we emerge.

We are not without being passionately attached to and entangled in relations, names, norms, and stories and, strictly speaking, these entanglements are more prior than that which is being entangled. We emerge passionately attached to and desiring the conditions of our own becoming. But insofar as our desires are precisely not external to norms and power structures, desires and desiring bodies cannot provide a backdrop or critical resistance against normalization and regulation. Rather, our desires are always traversed, produced, and sustained by those very norms and prohibitions that regulate desire.[13] The productivity of the relations to others, to norms, and names to which the subject is being subjected and subjects itself thus lies in the fact that passionate attachments are not simply regulated by and through these relations, but are in fact formed and created through them. The regulation and prohibition of a certain desire sustain and produce that very desire itself, because for

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[12] "[I]n the moment that I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not singlehandedly make them, then I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer" (*AL* 37).

[13] This critique of establishing a "single locus of great Refusal" (*HS* 95-6) has been made eloquently by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1 of the *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

the prohibition to work, it has to be specified by its object and take its object. Also, a prohibition as a social norm cannot exist in a disembodied form; a social norm always is a lived and thusly embodied norm. So the subject of desire as the desiring subject is created as it reiterates the founding regulation, which is a differentiation into being and not-being and into having and not-having. This does not mean that desire and power could be established as monolithic concepts; they instead must be seen as a multiplicity of intricate and interwoven differentials that is always context-dependent and context-creative. The efficacy of desire and power depends on their intimate relation of mutual sustenance and only works insofar as power and desire are social at the core.

Subject formation depends on the efficacy of power and desire as differentiating and individuating functions. Understanding differentiation and individuation as social processes means that subjects emerge in a process that conveys their intelligibility within a specific social context. At the same time, the formative process produces these contexts in which individuals are inaugurated by conveyance of intelligibility through the norms and rules of intelligibility. In other words, subject formation is dependent on the social codes that structure and govern the social contexts, and simultaneously subject formation proliferates and occasions these social codes. These codes that establish existence are never abstract, disembodied, and ahistorical codes, but their own existence is dependent on their being able to function, which itself requires a context of application and the application itself. The norms and rules of intelligibility are therefore discursive and material insofar as they are socially embodied in social interaction. Their materiality can be understood in the Althusserian sense of the materiality of ideology that undercuts the Marxist ontological split between the material base and ideological superstructure by affirming that "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (*ISA* 156).[14] Only within and through the mastery of these rules of intelligibility can the subject emerge, whereby the mastery, which is a learning of the rules and codes of expression, is itself a repetition and embodiment of these codes.

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[14] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Library Books, 1971) 121-73. Trans. of "Ideologie at appareils ideologiques d'etat," *Positions* (Paris: Edition Sociales, 1976) 67-122.

This bodily knowledge of the social rules by repetitive enactments that have sedimented into a bodily hexis has been theorized by Pierre Bourdieu as *habitus*.[15] Through this process of following and practicing social rules, the subject is seduced to life and formed as a subject. Subject formation therefore cannot take place prior to entry into the social, outside or separated from the social, but it is necessarily a function of the social. Subject formation is thus also necessarily intersubjective and equally necessarily a process of normalization governed by social codes and laws.

The individual, however, does not at one point assume its position as an intelligible agent—it is not at one point in time inaugurated as a social subject and then thereafter retains that status—but it needs to be re-inaugurated time and again through the repeated enactment of oneself. Because the individual is a discursive position, it is dependent on being sustained through the practice of self-formation. The subject as a product of subjectivation emerges only as a site of contestation, as "the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency" (*PL* 11). Drawing on Louis Althusser, who introduces the "individual" as a "placeholder" to retain the subject as a dynamic emerging concept, Butler emphasizes that "subject," as well as "individual" and "person," is to be understood as "a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation" (*PL* 10). This does not imply that the individual no longer exists as an *individual* and is dissolved into generality as a position that can be resignified arbitrarily, because as a repetitive re-enactment the repetitiveness is only intelligible as repetition if there is a connection between that which is re-enacted with that which has been enacted before. Hence, repeated discursive enactment cannot bring about an individuality that absolutely individualizes the individual by isolating it as a position that has no extension over time at all and so dissolves individuality in arbitrary interchangeability and indistinguishable generality. Rather, to understand the individual as a discursive position indicates that individuality cannot serve as a category to which unproblematic recourse can be sought in the service of resistance against social norms, because the discursive character of the individual exposes the

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[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

dependency of individuality on the social norms that occasion the individual's emergence.

To argue that persons as subjects are discursive does not mean that there are no real bodies, pains, pleasures, and desires, but it does mean that the reality of these bodies, pains, pleasures, and desires is dependent on their being experienced as such. Experiencing something as something always necessarily depends on a hermeneutic of that experience that makes it available as experience. Certain bodies, pains, pleasures, and desires, however, are unlivable as human bodies, pains, pleasures, and desires precisely because of a foreclosure that renders them unavailable as objects for the interpretation as human experiences. It would be a mistake to establish a monolithic notion of the hermeneutic; rather, there are various hermeneutic paradigms that compete with and among each other, and some are culturally prevalent and dominant, others relegated to the margins. Yet a paradigm is not simply a closed worldview in itself within which one is immersed and to which one is unalterably confined. One always already runs up against and experiences the limits of one's hermeneutic framework that is one's epistemological field. Since one operates from within that field, however, one is not in a position to look upon the field as a whole and so have reflective access to the field's topography. The limits are experienced, but they resist total sublation into reflective knowledge. This resistance depends on the fact that every paradigm works according to a certain foreclosure that again occasions the preservation and return of that which cannot be signified within the given order of being. Experience as interpretation is thus a practice that depends on the code of intelligibility. Codes and rules cannot function if they are not in use, and using a code is always a matter of repeating and citing. To become and be a person, one constantly and repeatedly has to practice oneself and form oneself and "is practiced" and formed through, within, and with regard to the norms of intelligibility in intersubjective interaction.

Understanding the subject as incessantly and performatively emerging in undergoing a bodily signification process whereby this signification takes place as a joint inscription and self-formation renders the strict differentiation between interiority and exteriority and between passivity and activity less clear and more dynamic. The differentiation between exteriority and interiority cannot be understood as established in a unique and individual founding moment, but rather exteriority and

interiority emerge and reemerge over time. The clear distinction between interiority and exteriority and their denotations is undermined by the impossiblity of aligning the body neatly with the notion of exteriority and the soul or psyche with interiority. If the body is formed in the social in the interaction with others in a process of social inscription of norms and if this formation is furthermore also a process of the soul or psyche acting upon the body, subjecting it to the social norms, and shaping it according to these requirements, then the psyche—as enveloping the body and laboring upon it—cannot be understood as interiority imprisoned by the body.

With regard to an understanding of subject formation as a process of shaping and stylizing that brings forth the subject, not only does the differentiation between exteriority and interiority not function unproblematically anymore, but even more so, the differentiation between passivity and activity is severely undermined. The subject cannot be theorized as an absolutely passive entity upon which others make demands and upon which the powers of the social, norms, and regulations labor in the form of other subjects and institutions and social structures. Rather, the subject's own activity and passionate attachment to its subjection have to be considered in the examination of how the psychic and the social are not merely inseparable and irreducible to each other, but also how the psychic and the social are furthermore productively bound up with each other as both active and passive in subject formation. The salience of this intertwinement of passivity and activity comes to the fore when thinking about acting, being responsible for actions, willing or not-willing actions. And, as Butler points out, the question of one's own activity and attachments becomes especially difficult when it comes to suffering, to what it means to be a victim and how to oppose oppression. In her exchange with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* Butler explains: "It is always tricky territory to suggest that one might actually identify with the position of the figure that one opposes because the fear, justifiably, is that the person who seeks to understand the psychic investment in one's own oppression will conclude that oppression is generated in the minds of the oppressed, or that the psyche trumps all

other conditions as the cause of one's own oppression" (*CHU* 149).[16] Just because it is "tricky territory" does not mean that one ought not go there; rather, one must proceed with care and tone must dare the risk for which there are no guarantees.

This nexus between identification and opposition as productive in subject formation is bound up with Butler's Foucaultian understanding of the productivity of power. This productivity of power is power's operating efficiently and pervasively through norms as regulating and normalizing exchanges and through the participants of these exchanges. These norms and codes, however, are not fixed, ahistorical, and static, but in being reproduced, they are productive themselves, and, furthermore, in depending on citation, they are always subject to slippage and reappropriations, because "repetition is never merely mechanical" (*PL* 16). The subjection by power that conditions subject formation through its dependence on reiteration is temporalized and thus "shows these conditions [of subordination] to be, not static structures, but temporalized—active and productive" (*PL* 16). From here one can now work out the Butlerian concept of "performativity" that is precisely a reiteration of norms and "is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it be simply equated with performance" (*BTM* 95). The elimination of the deliberately performing figure behind the act is the key feature of Butler's redeployment of the Austinian concept of the performative. This reconceptualization of "performativity" was introduced in *Gender Trouble* in Butler's argument for gender as performative and has been misunderstood by some as gender performance, as if one chooses one's gender and then performs accordingly and the performance then becomes "making the woman" or "making the man." To reintroduce such a notion of choice that precedes the performance is precisely to misunderstand Butler, because the performance is a forced one that is controlled and reinforced not on the deliberately conscious level, but that is the precondition to the possibility of consciousness, deliberation, and choice and continues to disturb them from the regions of the socially and psychically unconscious. This forced performance, in other words, is orchestrated where the psychic and the social are implicated in each other and regulated by the economy of

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[16] Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000) 11-43.

the unconscious. Butler sums up her argument of *Gender Trouble* in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*: "I suggested that the performance of gender creates the illusion of a prior substantiality—a core gendered self—and construes the effects of the performative ritual of gender as necessary emanations or causal consequences of that prior substance" (*CHU* 29). Subject formation, however, is not limited to the aspect of the formation of a gendered and sexed subject, but concerns the subject as such that never is apart from being gendered, sexed, racialized, aged, etc.[17] The reiteration of norms "constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (*BTM* 95), which means that subject formation is the sedimentative or materializing effect of repeated acts over time.

Subject formation, cast performatively as a tropological movement, is a bodily material practice at its core that is also social and psychic that is temporally extended. This extension is not only constituted by the reiteration of norms, codes, and names and by their having histories that exceed the histories of the subjects that they enable, but also there are others who will always already have addressed us and others whom we will have addressed in ways and with consequences we will never fully know. The emergent subject, then, is always to some extent already dispossessed by the various vectors of temporality that traverse it and of which its own death is only one—and perhaps not even the one that disorients the most. One difficulty in theorizing subject formation, in offering a theoretical inquiry into subject formation, is that theory itself, as it begins to speak and tell a story of subject formation, emerges as mobilizing and taking up its own position as a subject. Theorizing subject formation itself is not outside the emergence, the precariousness, and the transience of this subject that it attempts to grapple with. Theorizing itself is implicated in and traversed by the scenes and formations of origins of the subject that it attempts to offer. Theorizing subject formation remains traversed by otherness in ways that it cannot simply make sense of,

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[17] The list of race, gender, sex, and age needs to be expanded by sexuality, class, ethnicity and probably further categories, which here are implied by the *etc*,. which is an insufficient means to gesture towards the multiple trajectories through which the subject is constituted. This insufficiency also stems from the fact that it does not work to merely list these trajectories, but it is necessary to consider their interconnectedness, which renders them effective in the first place. If identity categories and their construction were not invested with desire, they would not ever become as powerful as they are. Butler's own considerations on this problematic can be found in the chapter "Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge" in *Bodies That Matter* and in an interview with Vikki Bell ("On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16 [1999]: 163-174).

cannot categorize and theorize exhaustively. But this does not mean that theorizing cannot attempt to make sense of that which evades our capabilities to make sense, nor does it mean that there might not be always the temptation and desire to foreclose upon and contain this irrecuperable dispossession. To simply speak of the priority of the other does not yet mean to have dislodged the subject as the center of theory and practice; rather, it means to have substituted yet another subject, another center, and that quietly in the back of the other reemerges with unbroken force that to which this other is other, namely, the subject. The challenge and task in theorizing subject formation, then, is to keep alive the questions of what this other and its otherness are, to continue to undergo the breakages, to continue to ask how to think this otherness. If this priority of the other fundamentally decenters the subject in theorizing this subject, then a study inquiring into subject formation cannot amount to a progressive narrative that will unfold and add up to its most full and complete version in the final chapter. Rather, the attempt will be to offer scenes of subject formation, to stage and restage scenes of thinking about the subject emerging in response and of inquiring into the particularity of the ethical, epistemological, and ontological problematics framed by the different stagings.

One scene, indispensable for inquiring into Butler's thinking, is that of self-consciousness' emergence that Hegel offers in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Self-consciousness as consciousness of oneself as oneself emerges in and through the self-reflexive turn, which is a double movement in two regards. On the one hand, it is a double creative movement; it produces that by which it appears to be occasioned, namely, the self, and necessarily installs the self as a pre-reflexive self prior to the self-reflexive self, the self-conscious self. Self-reflexivity, therefore, is creative in two ways, firstly by inaugurating the self and secondly by stylizing itself, the reflexive movement, as the secondary effect. On the other hand, self-reflexivity is also a double movement insofar as it not only conditions consciousness *of* oneself, but consciousness *of* oneself *as* oneself. One could thus say that it is a reflective reflexive movement or reflective reflexivity that occasions what it is said to reflect on. Another core feature of becoming self-consciousness is desire, which, as is the case in many of Butler's works, is crucial to her reading of Hegel. Hegel offers that "self-

consciousness in general is Desire" (*PhS* ¶167; "[Selbstbewußtsein] ist *Begierde* überhaupt" [*PhG* 139])[18] and understands desire as arising out of the experience of otherness that produces the striving to overcome this otherness. He argues that for consciousness to become itself in becoming self-conscious, it must necessarily lose itself and become other than itself. Self-consciousness as desire is the desire of consciousness for integrity and certainty, which is negotiated in the process of coming to knowledge of the object world in which consciousness finds itself. Thus, matters are intricate insofar as self-consciousness is desire, but desire is also other to self-consciousness and figures as a mode of the emergence of self-consciousness in its journey of becoming other to itself and returning to itself. This othering and returning in connection with the negotiation of passionate attachments exposes not only the constitution of the body as a site of contestation in subject formation, but the subject's necessity to become other than itself and return to itself also exposes the intersubjective context for the altercation of desire, self-consciousness, and otherness that brings forth recognition.

This Hegelian account has been challenged by psychoanalysis, raising the question of the role of the other and the other's otherness and the implications of desire continuing to traverse and trouble self-consciousness. Engaging with psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche in her *Adorno Lectures,* Butler asks how subject formation and recognition are complicated by theorizing the other's address, response, and responsibility as primary and thus traversing and transforming thinking about recognition. The scene Laplanche proffers is the scene wherein the infant is overwhelmed by the message that comes from the other. The infant, who does not yet have an ego or unconscious, cannot understand what the other wants and desires. This message arrives as an address, demanding and inciting a response. At the same time as the address overwhelms, it thus also enables the emergence of an I desiring to respond. The response to being overwhelmed by the meanings and desires of the other is cast by Laplanche as an attempt to translate as best as possible, while that which cannot be translated is repressed and constitutes the unconscious as the other within

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[18] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomeologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). Translations are from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller, foreword by John Niemeyer Findlay (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977).

that can never be quite contained. Otherness and having been irrecuperably ruptured by otherness hence materialize as a precondition for the possibility to respond and relate to the other. This relation, as well as subject formation, depends constitutively on repression and foreclosure as well as on the precariousness of this closing off. The closing off that happens in repression and the formation of the unconscious does not pacify the dispossession by desire. But this seemingly dyadic scene is always already delimited and traversed by the social and cultural context in which it is implicated. Hence, the emergence of the subject, the unconscious, and its desires is not separate from the social. Norms and regulations determine and fuel the scene of subject formation, insofar that which overwhelms—that is, the unconscious meanings and desires in the message coming from the other—is precisely an operation of social norms and regulations. Desire therefore turns out to be the subject's own opacity that emerges in the process of individuation that is also a collaborating in the normalization and regulation of the subject, because of the subject's own passionate attachment to the regulating norms and prohibitions. This passionate attachment orchestrates the turning on oneself that is the tropological movement through which the subject as self-consciousness emerges and to which the subject owes its incessantly indeterminate ontological status, because the tropological movement as a metonymic movement of displacement is an undoing at the same time.

The turning on oneself as self-subjection and self-castigation in accordance with the social norms is an ambivalent undertaking insofar as this self-subjection is valorized and bound up with the formation of bad conscience as incessantly driving agency that fuels the repetitive self-acquittal. This aspect of subject formation as bound up with the formation of bad conscience and the intersubjective conditioning of bad conscience by imposition of punishment will be examined in this study in the context of Butler's inquiry into Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." This turning on oneself figures as the movement of conscience, which operates by the subject taking itself as an object of reflection, but this reflection in conscience is always already an evaluative measurement. Nietzsche tells us that the subject's capacity to "say yes to itself" by means of its conscience is produced through the fabrication of bad conscience, which in return comes about only as an effect of punishment for breaking one's promise. The originary form of this punishment is, as Nietzsche presents it, the creditor punishing

the debtor for not paying back his debts. One key question therefore is what kind of violence is implied in this staging through which the subject emerges at the same time as it partakes in a violent turning on itself in bad conscience. Butler's reading of Nietzsche's account of subject formation through punishment and through the production of bad conscience is facilitated by psychoanalysis, which allows her to question the understanding of conscience as an unproblematic internalization of external prohibitions and punishments with regard to the passionate attachments to precisely these external conditions. The openness and responsiveness to being charged and addressed resonate in Butler's reading of the scene Althusser stages, where the subject emerges in turning to an address arriving in the name of the law. Althusser's account bears resemblances to Nietzsche's insofar as the subject comes about in the mode of responding conscientiously and insofar as subject formation seems to operate through a certain prior and primary openness to being addressed and being held accountable by an other as well as by oneself. Althusser's focus, however, differs from Nietzsche's, insofar as Althusser is interested in how ideology comes to be materialized as social authority in and through structures that are able to interpellate and bring about conscientious subjects.

The priority of the addressing other and a strange primary guilt are also core to Levinas' thinking subject formation. The mode of the subject's emergence in Levinas is a responsibility that is more prior than the subject itself and comes upon the I through the face that relates the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." The I emerges only belatedly and thus with a faulty consciousness, a bad conscience, because it is irrecuperably too late and cannot know whether it has not already deserted the other. The face does not only enjoin the I and render the I infinitely responsible, but the face also instills a desire to kill the other within the I. Levinas intensifies this scene to its breaking point by expounding that through the address of the other the I emerges under accusation by everyone and in substitution for everyone. And in this substitution the I is singled out, individualized to the point of being unsubstituable. Engaging with Levinas, the questions are how to speak subject formation and what kind of violence operates at the core of this theory, especially when Levinas claims that subject formation is "described by the ethical terms accusation, persecution, and

responsibility for the others" (*OTB* 121).[19] In asking these questions, we have to keep in mind, however, that the primary scene with which Levinas confronts us is precisely not experienced or empirical in any other way. The encounter with the other, the face delivering the commandment, is a past that is older than any present and more prior than any logical priority, because it comes before time and logos. The face-to-face encounter and subsequent responsibility—in the absolute sense that Levinas gives it— emerge then not only as the condition of possibility for the subject, experience, the present, and relations with others, but this responsibility also keeps traversing and troubling this present. And yet it is the ambivalent and conflicted face-to-face relation that also is the condition for the possibility of discourse: "To be in relation with the other face to face—is to be unable to kill. This is also the situation of discourse" (*EN* 10).[20] Discourse is peace, but this peace, which comes only through face-to-face relationship, is not simply harmony. Rather, peace seems to emerge as not foreclosing on our exposedness, on our vulnerability, and as remaining vigilant to the possibility and reality of violence and suffering. The question that reemerges with unbroken urgency here is that of the status and framing of the primary scene. What does it mean to conceive of subject formation in "ethical terms" by way of being founded on the inescapability of being accused, persecuted, and summoned to substitute for the other? What does it mean to speak of a relation prior to all signification and history? What and who comes to appear as this face and what and who will not be able to appear as a face? What role do frameworks of intelligibility play? How do we come into a critical relation to these frameworks, and how is resistance possible?

Thinking about the possibility of resistance in the context of Butler's thought is bound up with the contentious issue of how the discursive process of subject formation precisely can produce materiality. The necessary failure of the attempted totalizing of subjectivating norms will be exposed by showing that their efficacy depends on the production of an inassimilable remainder that is proliferated in the reiteration of signification, while at the same time this remainder ensures that the norms continue to be in effect. That which resists normalization thus turns out to be

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[19] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2000).
[20] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia UP, 1998).

the constitutive condition of the possibility for normalization. Since the efficacy of the signifying norms thus depends on their reiteration, they are necessarily nonidentical, because otherwise reiteration could not be perceived as reiteration. Hence, the norms are open to resignification and reappropriation. This openness and the necessary production of that which resists totalization lead into the much discussed question of agency. This question asks how nonidentical performatively emerging subjects can be understood as acting intentionally and deliberately if actions form the subject and the subject is subjected to its actions. Butler's writings argue unquestionably for the possibility of such action, but what does it mean that this nonidentical subject comes to deliberate about its acting and to decide upon taking action? What kind of self-relation is implied in this possibility and mobilization of agency?

With the question of self-relation, the question "who am I?" resurfaces at the back of this acting. Self-concept arises as that which is the enacted reflection of the experience of oneself as extended over time. The emergent subject becomes conscious of itself *as* extended over time and comes to understand itself not as having some history, as being somehow extended over time, but as being a *specific* extension over time. In Hegelian terms, this aspect of subject formation is self-consciousness' becoming determinate as a *determinate* extension over time, as having and inhabiting particular stories, although never quite becoming and being reducible to these stories. The subject emerges by being cast as both a biographical and an autobiographical account. In order to inquire into this dimension of subject formation, Paul Ricoeur's account of emplotment will be examined and reread as an account of enacted emplotment that elucidates how the subject's emerging in the interplay of the social, the psychic, and the somatic can also emerge as a subject's understanding itself as constantly emerging in an incessant process of subjection and subjectivation that is the negotiating of selfhood and otherness. This dialectic of selfhood and otherness is subject formative only because it is inseparably bound up with the workings of desire and because it stands in irreparably dynamic tension with the trias of the body, the social, and the psyche.

But this dynamic of these "tensions" does not appease the severity that lies at the core of these tensions. Unpacifiably, as before, we are faced with the question of violence, the question of how to act responsibly in the face of the other, in the face of precariousness and vulnerability. Is there, then, no mercy in subject formation? This

situation presents a certain temptation to think about theology and to offer thinking about faith and redemption as a certain consequence. But this does not mean that the philosophical paradox turns philosophy into theology; rather, what breaks open through this paradox might be the possibility of reflecting on theology, on what it might mean to think about faith as a mode of subject formation. There is no logical progression from philosophy to theology; just as there cannot be any rational proof for faith; this transition from philosophy to theology will always be an unfaithful leap. While this leap will in the end always be radically unjustifiable, this does not mean that we cannot reflect on it. Perhaps it is because of its unjustifiability that we are called to reflect on it and to let ourselves be called into question by its claims and performances.

Kierkegaard as a thinker and poet of the leap of faith is a figure to engage with in our thinking about the limits and possibilities of such an unfaithful leap and about the consequences and predicaments for thinking about ethics and responsibility. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*[21] is an especially suitable as well as challenging interlocutor for tarrying with the relation between ethics and religion, ethics and theology. The particular predicament framing the possibility for this inquiry is what happens if there are divine demands coming into conflict with the demand of the human other and the ethical norms of the community. Faith as well as theology, then, cannot emerge without fear and trembling and certainly not as a bargain or insurance policy against the vicissitudes of life. Rather, faith and theology continuously have the opportunity to emerge in experiencing the limits of our knowing and deliberating, in encountering contingency, transience, and the precariousness of life. Faith, then, is not a practice of removing and distancing oneself from life and relations with others, but rather faith continuously returns us to the daily political and social struggles and the anxiety and hope without end without which there is no life.

If we now return to the question of how to engage with Butler, subject formation, and responsibility, then we have to ask what kind of scenes of encounter are at work. Butler offers accounts of encounters with otherness, with others, with the other as constitutive for the formation of the I. The I emerges only through being addressed.

But whose I is this? The failure to grasp individuality as soon as one attempts to offer an account of the individuality of the I seems to be a constitutive one, one implied by the strange life of the I. The I does not fail in marking the individual and personal, but in doing so, it is so very individual and personal that it signifies precisely the impossibility of individuality in language. The communicability of the I depends on the repeatability of the I and its failure to ever be fully mine. In saying "I," I take up this I and make it mine, but it can never be fully mine. The I is the moment in language that singles any one out only because it cannot be secured from performing beyond one instance. But what does that then mean for thinking about subject formation and responsibility and for speaking of the emergence of the I in response to being addressed?

Perhaps what we see is how such speaking—while evincing a certain phenomenological approach, offering descriptive insights—assumes a strange kind of persuasive life that compels in a peculiar fashion. At issue, then, is not only my desire to inquire into this or that account of subject formation, but that with my inquiry I offer another account that addresses in return, be it in the form of attempting to delimit questions. As Butler has worked out carefully throughout her work, we cannot be but by being addressed, interpellated, overwhelmed at first, and our attempts at responding turn out to be addresses in return. The task is not to end the interplay of being addressed and addressing or to render the acts of addresses fully conscious, because the life of the address and the life to which we are seduced through the address works precisely insofar as it is beyond our control. This seems like an irresolvable predicament for an ethical theory, however, especially when the scenes of subject formation are scenes of struggle and desire, pleasure and foreclosure, guilt and bad conscience, promises always already broken, passionate attachments to subjection, and others overwhelming, demanding, betrayed and betraying. There is a recurring ambivalence at play, constantly prompting the question "What does it mean to install ambivalence, violent ambivalence, at the very heart of considerations on subject formation?"

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[21] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* trans. Howard V. Hong and Enda H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

Butler will not relieve these questions; she does not offer a handbook for how to become and think ethically, and the—by no means unambivalent—strength and power of that thinking lies precisely in this holding out, the courage to hold the ambivalence present. Hence, such thinking has to risk its own openness, reopening the question of what it means to theorize, what violence is implied and applied in and through becoming a subject, what violence is at the core of thinking the subject. And if inquiring into subject formation is bound up with interrogating this openness and responsiveness to being addressed and the capacity of my response being an address in return, then what we reencounter here is not only the question how to respond and respond *well*, but also how to address *responsibly*, How to theorize responsibly in the face of the other? In the face of violence and suffering? What does it mean to theorize subject formation and being addressed by an other as constitutive for subject formation? In what ways is such theorizing itself a kind of an address? What are the different ways in which an address affects the addressee? How to offer a response that is an address in return when the addressee cannot be known?

For Butler, this is the point where the subject emerges in a dawning reflectiveness humbly facing the other: "And so one might say, reflectively, and so with a certain sense of humility, that in the beginning *I am my relation to you*, ambiguously addressed and addressing, given over to a you without whom I cannot be, upon whom I depend to survive" (*AL* 90-1). The shift Butler performs here is crucial. The scene is introduced by "*one* might say," but in speaking the relationship, it is no longer that "one is one's relation to a you," but rather "I am my relation to you." In this relation to you, it is not possible for me to slip away (although the I always slips away, individualizing by failing to remain utterly private). Speaking the I is not merely a stylistic choice; there is no one who could speak this being given over into each other's hands from the position of the one, offering a phenomenological account without losing something crucial, namely, speaking my vulnerability to you, my dependence on you, my addressing you in my attempt to respond that is my coming to life to you. And only because the response is not only a response but another address can there be communication at all. The response thus is an opening towards an other, where the other becomes the you for me without my being ever able to fully know who the other is, who you are. I come to wonder what happens as I am addressing myself to this other who I address as "you," but who are you? Through the response

that addresses you, the face-to-face is inaugurated that is risking the I, not only mine that becomes mine only insofar as I am addressing you, as I am given over into your hands. But the face-to-face is risking just as well the other's I, and there is no way for us to ever fully control and delimit this risk. Yet, as Levinas reminds us, communication can exist only in the face of this risk and as the living of this very risk: "[C]ommunication rests on incertitude ... Communication with the other can be transcendence only as a dangerous life, as a fine risk to be run" (*OTB* 120).

The perilous life lived in communication is not just the risk of misunderstanding and misinformation, but—more fundamental and before all information or misinformation—the risk is the condition of the possibility of communication that attempts to relay something. This risk is, in Butler's words, my being in relation with you, my being exposed to you and in that face-to-face your being exposed to me. This does not mean that we could now know the reciprocity of exposure and simply offer each other acknowledgement in our exposedness to each other, because this exposedness is constituted by our specific and individual histories of having been overwhelmed and wounded. I cannot know *how* precisely to offer you this acknowledgement. My gestures, my words that I offer you, might be precisely that which turns out to reactivate scenes of trauma. You cannot warn me ahead of time, as well as I cannot tell you what precisely I need for you to acknowledge me, because that which makes us vulnerable and exposed is precisely the opacity of ourselves to ourselves. Throughout her work, Butler inquires into and labors on the limits of acknowledgement and what happens at these limits. In her *Adorno Lectures* she asks us to think about what it means that acknowledgement meets its limits and what it might mean to offer acknowledgement that one cannot ever offer fully and safely. Her suggestion is that this might enable us to acknowledge the limits of acknowledgment and so practice acknowledgment through the limits of acknowledgment itself. Opacity is not rendered transparent, but it is acknowledged and thus retained as opaque and returns as that which troubles and continues to trouble all attempts to know and to found action on knowledge and mastery. The kind of practice that might be able to emerge through acknowledging the limits of acknowledgement, through acknowledging our constitutive opacity, is an ethical practice that will always be critical as much as it will always be risky: "Ethics," as Butler says, "requires that we risk ourselves precisely there, at the moments of our unknowingness, when what

conditions us and what lies before us diverge from one another, when our willingness to become undone constitutes our chance of becoming human, a becoming whose necessity knows no end" (*AL* 144).

1 Self-consciousness, Desire, Body—Hegelian Subjects

Why begin a study that concerns itself with subject formation in the context of Judith Butler's thinking by turning to Hegel? Perhaps this turning is motivated by Butler's claim that she understands herself as "Hegelian" and that all of her books deal in one way or another with questions of the relation between desire and recognition stemming from her reading of Hegel.[22] Therefore, even though in the new preface to the second edition of her earliest book she claims that she considers *Subjects of Desire* her "juvenilia" (*SD* viii), it is important to turn to this work in order to consider the Hegelian background to her thinking that is pervasive throughout her writing. Another reason for turning to Hegel and to Butler's reading of Hegel might lie in the fact that it is subject *formation* that is to be examined and that Hegel's account of consciousness' journey that brings about consciousness as self-consciousness is a text that attempts to capture and stage the dynamic character of the emergence of the subject as self-consciousness both in the text's content as well as in its rhetorical and narrative form. Certainly the project of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* cannot be reduced solely to the question of subject formation, but here we are concerned with Butler's reading of Hegel, and the consideration of subject formation within the context of Judith Butler's thinking that emerges from a reading of both Butler and Hegel necessarily is selective and interpretative, but hopefully productive in itself as well.

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[22] See the 1998 preface to the second edition of Butler's published dissertation *Subjects of Desire* and the interview "Eine Welt, in der Antigone am Leben geblieben wäre" (*Deutsche Zeitung für Philosophie* 49 [2001]: 587-599), where Butler states: "Hegel does not let me go. From the beginning the relation between desire and recognition has been the philosophical theme that has interested me most in Hegel. In one way or the other, all my books deal with this question" (588; my translation; German original: "Hegel lässt mich nicht los. Das Verhältnis von Begierde und Anerkennung ist von Anfang an das philosophische Thema, das mich an Hegel am meisten interessiert. Auf die eine oder andere Weise handeln alle meine Bücher von dieser Frage.").

1.1 Desire and the Emergence of Self-consciousness

In the consciousness chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, consciousness is propelled by the dialectic between its striving for certainty about its knowledge of the objects in the world and its constant discovery of the insufficiency of the state and knowledge that it has reached. For consciousness to be consciousness, it needs to be consciousness *of* something and therefore needs to take an object; "it must become *determinate* thought," Butler insists (*SD* 26). Consciousness can only become determinate through something external to itself, through "something" that is other than itself. This means that consciousness is always directed to the object world. And it seems that consciousness has knowledge about objects as specific objects in an immediate way that originates from its immersion in the object-world. The knowledge therefore exists for consciousness in the mode of sense-certainty and seems to be the fullest form of knowledge since it is knowing an object as this specific object in its very specificity owing to the immediate grasp of the material. It turns out, though, that in order to grasp something in its specificity and to know it as such, it is necessary to subsume it under universal concepts and notions in order describe the specificity. Hence, the specific is not signifiable in itself and as itself, but in being grasped, the specific is signified and made intelligible by means of concepts. Grasping the specific thus negates the specific as specific.

Because the specific has no being in itself, it has to become and dissolve and is nothing more than the transitory medium for the concept. In this negation of immediate knowledge of the object, the immediate is not vanquished, but is retained in mediated form through the negation as the content of the negation. This relation means that the specific is not utterly obliterated; hence, the negation as utter negation is itself negated. Here the negation of the negation emerges, which is the subsuming of the specific under a universal, whereby the specific is regained. This regaining is the belated coming to know explicitly that which had been there before. This movement as a "perpetual alternation of determining what is true, and then setting

aside this determining" is consciousness' "everyday life" (*PhS* ¶131)[23] in its becoming *determinate* thought. So consciousness is striving for certainty and determination, and since it is itself that is striving for constancy and determination, it is unable to think of itself as changing. Therefore, as consciousness becomes aware of this movement, it locates the reason for this incessant movement in the objects encountered themselves. The inner essence of the objects is then understood as Force, which causes the objects to take on their various outer features, which are manifold. The differentiations are then grasped as the effect of an inner identity that differentiates itself out of necessity, as it posits its own external manifestation.

Since the inner essence is necessarily not identical with the external manifestation, the positing of this external manifestation is a movement of self-differentiation that seems to negate identity. "The self-identical divides itself" (*PhS* ¶162; "das Sichselbstgleiche entzweit sich" [*PhG* 132]), but because the inner being is understood as an *Entzweien* (self-sundering), the *Sichselbstgleichwerden* (becoming self-identical) takes place in the very process of the *Entzweien*. The *Entzweien*, as a differentiating that negates identity, is thus negated and this *Sichselbstgleichwerden* is thus a movement of *Sich-Aufheben* (self-supersession or, rather, self-sublation).[24] This movement is "infinity, or ... absolute unrest of pure self-movement" (*PhS* ¶163)[25], which has been present all the way along, but the *self*-movement emerges just now in the form of an explanation as consciousness explains to itself its knowing about the objects. In explanation this absolute unrest of self-movement becomes consciousness' object, and "in being finally an object for consciousness, as *that which it is,*

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[23] In German the entire passage reads: "Dieser Verlauf, ein beständig abwechselndes Bestimmen des Wahren und Aufheben dieses Bestimmens macht eigentlich das tägliche und beständige Leben und Treiben des Wahrnehmenden und in der Wahrheit sich zu bewegen meinenden Bewußtseins aus" (*PhG* 106).

[24] In the English version of the *Phenomenology*, the concept and movement of *Aufhebung* is translated as *supersession*. *Aufheben* has various different senses: (1) to raise, to lift up; (2) to annul, to cancel, to suspend; (3) to keep, to preserve. In Hegel's use of *Aufheben/Aufhebung*, all of these three senses play an important role, as through *Aufhebung* a new and higher stage is reached by which the former is negated, but at the same time because this is a determinate negation, the negated is preserved. The term *supersession* does not seem capable of preserving this interplay of the senses. As Michael Inwood points out in his *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): "A similar ambiguity occurs in the Latin *tollere*, which means (1) 'to raise up' and (2) 'to take up from its place, i.e. to destroy, remove" (283). The English term *sublation* is derived from the past participle of *tollere*, which is *sublatus*.

[25] "Unendlichkeit oder diese absolute Unruhe des reinen Sichselbstbewegens" (*PhG* 133).

consciousness is thus *self-consciousness*" (*PhS* ¶163).[26] In the attempt to think force as the concept of inner difference that is becoming while dissolving determinate shape, self-consciousness arises. It dawns upon consciousness in the effort to explain what it knows and how it knows that itself plays a constitutive role in the process of cognition. This dawning is a coming to knowledge of itself that consciousness seems to undergo without taking itself as an object of knowledge directly and from the beginning.

Consciousness strives for knowledge because, in order to be consciousness, it needs to become determinate and it is thus directed towards taking an object. This intentionality of consciousness is precisely that necessity that needs to externalize itself in order to become itself. Consciousness is directed towards the objects "out there" in the world, but this is not a static condition, because the directedness is a force that actualizes itself in the context of being in the world that is an encountering of this object world. But the encountering as immediate encountering does not yet lead to the determinacy that allows consciousness to emerge as consciousness of something. Immediate sense-certainty and immediate knowledge of the specific have proven themselves as impossible for consciousness. As consciousness attempted to ensure itself of its immediate certainty of the specific, this movement necessitated a reflection that was exposed as the negation of the specific object at first, but then turned out to be preserving the specific object through the sublation of it in the negation of the negation. In that process, consciousness externalizes itself in the movement of the encountering the object world, but in experiencing this encounter, knowledge of the immediate is only possible in mediated form.

Consciousness cannot remain with the object, but has to sublate it into reflection, and thus returns to itself. At that point, consciousness could not see that this is what it itself does; only now, in explaining to itself the concept of force, consciousness comes to realize itself as movement that goes out of itself and so sunders itself in having to go to the object and in returning to itself in sublating the object into knowledge. Thus, consciousness becomes an object of its own reflection; self-consciousness "emerges

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[26] In German the passage reads: "[A]ls Erklären tritt sie [die absolute Unruhe des reinen Sichselbstbewegens] zunächst fei hervor; und indem sie endlich für das Bewußtsein Gegenstand ist, *als das, was sie ist*, so ist das Bewußtsein *Selbstbewußtsein*" (*PhG* 133).

as a kind of knowing that is at once a mode of becoming; it is suffered, dramatized, enacted" (*SD* 28). Knowing hence is not something the Hegelian subject immediately masters and by which it relentlessly devours all otherness; rather, the subject emerges here in a mode of undergoing. It seems as if the subject undergoes its own activity, constantly stumbling over itself and its engaging with the world, always slightly belated, trying to grasp what must have happened, never quite able to gain full consciousness of what is going on. And at this point in the narrative, reflection has not yet proceeded so far that the emerging self-consciousness would have reflective knowledge so that it could know that what it does in this movement is what it needs to do out of necessity to become itself. Self-consciousness cannot yet know that in this becoming itself it realizes its identity as a mode of becoming itself in the movement from becoming other than itself and returning to itself and proliferating the drive to become other than itself as it returns to itself.

So far, it seems as if self-consciousness has been emerging in the process of a reflection on the procedure of cognition, in and through consciousness' necessary engagement with the object world. This process of cognition appears as an incessant movement, a forceful movement, and while it is a movement that has knowledge as its objective, it appeared as a neutral and dispassionate necessity. But, as Butler works out carefully, this striving for certainty about the object world and finally itself and its own recognition is intricately bound up with desire. This striving is a passionate desire for prevailing over the otherness as that which the object world is encountered. The encounter with otherness is that which occasions self-consciousness as a desire to overcome the apparent ontological difference between consciousness and its world, because the otherness of the object world is experienced as meaningless except for its signifying the limitations of consciousness' own understanding. The desire that is incited thus is a "desire for a more expanded version of the subject" (*SD* 34), because the subject has always already run up against the limits of understanding the essence and circumstances of its own existence. The limits are always that which is experienced as otherness, which can be other only as a determinate negation and so reveals some presupposed knowledge about the "not-I." The experience of something as other thus unveils that reflexive consciousness has been present all throughout the journey: "consciousness of an 'other,' of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, a reflectedness-into-self, consciousness of itself in its otherness" (*PhS*

¶164).[27] So becoming conscious of anything, grasping something, attaining knowledge of something does not only mean that one becomes conscious of this or that object-other, but at the same time, Hegel tells us, consciousness of an other implies and instantiates consciousness of the same, the not-other, consciousness itself. But this consciousness of itself comes to consciousness only in knowing an object-other, so the other, while the aim of knowledge, also becomes the medium for self-consciousness' realizing itself as other than this grasped other.

The emerging self-conscious subject seems to be caught in a circular movement here, insofar as it cannot ever simply rest, because it needs to become determinate thought, but at the same time, we have also seen that the Hegelian subject seems to be unable to know an other without forsaking this other's otherness. So otherness in terms of an object's otherness respective to the subject is necessary for consciousness' subsisting, because, owing to its directedness, it needs to take an object in order to become determinate. Hence, a desire for an other is constantly proliferated as a condition of consciousness' life, which unquestionably finds no end with the discovery of consciousness as self-consciousness since self-consciousness still is consciousness. But this desire is bound up with and fueled by self-consciousness' desire for absolute integrity or for unchangeability and unity, and so self-consciousness meets its limits in experiencing the impossibility to overcome the otherness of the world that limits and sustains self-consciousness.

The integrity that self-consciousness desires can only be reached through "the negation of dependence on something other, it is the recognition of self in all which is essential to me" (Taylor 149). In order to take itself as only an object that is essential to itself and not dependent on an other, the subject has to posit itself as a pure inner being, as pure mind, but in doing so, self-consciousness has to deny its bodily existence because of its dependence on material objects. The body in its materiality and dependence on the object world thus is that which is to be overcome. But in denying its corporeality, self-consciousness gets caught in the circles of definite negation, and as it renders its body other, it ends up proliferating otherness in its body.

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[27] The German original here reads: "Das Bewußtsein eines Anderen, eines Gegenstandes überhaupt, ist ... notwendig *Selbstbewußtsein*, Reflektiertsein in sich, Bewußtsein seiner selbst in seinem Anderssein" (*PhG* 135).

Otherness, however, is that which is to be eliminated because, as limit and limiting, it obstructs self-consciousness' desire for unity while at the same time the proliferation of otherness again is that which fuels desire.

Desire here emerges as not only propelling consciousness' emergence as self-consciousness—and as driving Butler's inquiry into Hegel and subject formation in general—and desire is not merely accidental to self-consciousness; rather, "Self-consciousness in general is Desire" (*PhS* ¶167; "es [das Selbstbewußtsein] ist Begierde überhaupt" [*PhG* 139]). Desire of the subject reflects on the one hand the material need for an object and on the other hand the fundamental urge for unity or unchangeability. The German term *Begierde* (desire) carries a much cruder connotation than the English *desire*, and when Hegel states that "the object of immediate desire is a *living thing*" (*PhS* ¶168; "der Gegenstand der unmittelbaren Begierde ist ein *Lebendiges*" [*PhG* 139]), it becomes obvious that at first desire is very much the bare survival drive (*Überlebenstrieb*) and its object is simply life. As does any conceptual term, *Begierde* undergoes a series of reformations and transformations in the course of the journey through the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the originally very crude denotation of *Begierde* as merely hunger for life becomes the more refined notion of *Begehren*, which the English *desire* reflects. *Begierde* is revealed and reformed through the series of reflections precisely as being self-reflexive all along as it has been animating and inaugurating the self-conscious subject. So here we see how the "is" in Hegelian logic works in both ways, so that desire is not only the predicate characterizing self-consciousness in the statement "self-consciousness is desire." But in the process that self-consciousness emerges as desire, desire is being reformulated and revealed as self-consciousness. Self-consciousness' emergence in Hegel's narrative is an undergoing, a suffering, dramatically staged and restaged, as it is fueled by passion and passionately reveals self-consciousness as desire.

So far we have been concerned mainly with the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness that has turned out to be a turning of consciousness to itself. This turning occurs not because consciousness directly takes itself as the object of its desire, but because the reflective movement has been unveiled as a constitutive moment of consciousness' project to know. Knowledge as consciously reflective understanding of something cannot be immediately intimate with that something, but

always has to be mediated through a process of the "something" becoming an object to the consciousness that aspires to understand and integrate the object-other into itself as knowledge of the other. Consciousness thus cannot be immediately the object of its desire, because for this to be possible, consciousness would have to be other to itself. Desire emerges here as constituted by a negation that is a *determinate* negation, and this is where the reflexivity of self-consciousness as desire lies: desire is constituted by the negation, by consciousness taking the other, the not-self, as its object, but with the effect that it is essentially transformed by that object. Consciousness thus indirectly, or one could say reflexively, turns out to be desiring itself in the form of desiring to know the circumstances and mode of its existence in the world. But to desire to know itself as a knowing subject, as consciousness, means for consciousness to desire to take itself as an object of knowledge.

In order to take itself as an object of knowledge, consciousness has to become other than itself. Self-consciousness thus emerges only by consciousness becoming other to itself in a movement of distinguishing itself from itself, while at the same time coming to realize that this which is distinguished is nothing other than itself.[28] Hegel characterizes self-consciousness as therefore "essentially the return from otherness" (*PhS* ¶167; "wesentlich die Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein" [*PhG* 138]), and Butler reflects on this movement of the transformation of consciousness: "Whereas the initial confrontation with otherness enforces a sense of limitation on consciousness, the satisfaction of desire reveals a more capable self, one that is able to admit its interdependence, and thereby gain a more expanded and expansive identity" (*SD* 35). The emergent subject gains knowledge of its own interrelatedness with the world and so the irreducible ontological difference between consciousness and object world is not only separating, but equally binding. The binding character springs from the fact that in the act of desiring and striving for the other and negating the other's otherness in "consuming" the other by taking it up into consciousness itself, consciousness experiences itself as prevailing over the other.

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[28] "I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am directly aware that what is distinguished from myself is not different [from me] (sic). I, the selfsame being, repel myself from myself, but what is posited as distinct from me, is immediately, in being so distinguished, not a distinction for me" (*PhS* ¶164); "Ich unterscheide mich von mir selbst, und es ist darin unmittelbar für mich, daß dies Unterschiedene nicht

So in this act of sublating the foreign reality by consuming it and thus destroying the independence of the object encountered as self-subsistent, self-consciousness ensures its own subsistence through ensuring the nothingness of the object. Furthermore, self-consciousness also becomes aware of itself as negating agency, and in this becoming aware, it obtains certainty about itself as powerful agency of accomplishment. This consuming, destructive activity is the aspect that defines self-consciousness as negativity, because only through the annihilation of the self-subsistence of the object-other can self-consciousness be certain of itself. At this point, the economy of desire is elucidated with regard to consumption and satisfaction. Satisfaction always depends on the consumption of the object of desire; however, the satisfaction, i.e., the self-certainty, of self-consciousness depends on the object that no longer exists and thus the desire is reproduced through the very act of the consumption.

Self-consciousness is dependent on the other, and because self-consciousness as desire always takes an other as its object, desire is that which is traversing and othering the desiring self-consciousness itself: "desire reveals the desiring agent as intrinsically other to itself: self-consciousness is an *ek-static* being, outside itself, in search of self-recovery" (*SD* 39). The only way for self-consciousness to pursue self-recovery is, owing to its dependence on the world, to constantly pursue alterity. Self-consciousness can affirm itself and become certain of itself only by negating and sublating that other which it encounters as having a life, an existence of its own.[29] Self-determination thus cannot take place in any other form than negation. But because the sublation of this other is constitutive of self-consciousness' certainty and satisfaction, this other is necessary to satisfaction and certainty. Self-consciousness seems to have been mistaken once again in its certainty, because in the attempt to negate and assure itself of the nothingness of the object-other, it ends up to be unable to fully sublate this other: "[S]elf-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it [the other]; it is really because of that relation that it produces

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unterschieden ist. Ich, das Gleichnamige, stoße mich von mir selbst ab; aber dies Unterschiedene, Ungleich-Gesetzte ist unmittelbar, indem es unterschieden ist, kein Unterschied für mich" (*PhG* 134-5).

[29] "[S]elf-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire" (¶173). "[D]as Selbstbewußtsein [ist]

the object again, and the desire as well" (*PhS* ¶175).[30] So desire as well as the other turn out to be reproduced, but what does this mean for self-consciousness and its desire for knowledge and certainty? As we have seen before, the objects of desire emerge as twofold, because not only are the objects in the world the objects of consciousness' desire, but at the same time, consciousness' desire turns out to be reflexive, i.e., consciousness becoming aware that in desiring's moving out of itself, it also takes itself as an object. If now the subject becomes aware of its own impossibility to achieve independence and certainty, the question is not only how does this affect the encounter with otherness in the object world, but also what this dawning awareness of itself as dependent and productive in its negating power and activity means for self-consciousness reflexively. In other words, how does self-consciousness readjust to the new situation of itself as negating agency and reproducing its own dependence, and how is this change bound up with self-consciousness' understanding of itself?

The problem in the encounter with the object-other seems to have been that self-consciousness in its negative relation to this other has not been able to sublate this other, but merely reproduced the other. So for satisfaction another kind of encounter with otherness must be found, as self-consciousness also depends on both the possibility of the "negative relation" to the other as well as the other's independent existence beyond the negating encounter with self-consciousness. If sublation is to be understood as negation of the negation and if the aim is for self-consciousness to sublate the other, then this other, so Hegel insists, "must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be *for* the other what it *is*" (*PhS* ¶175).[31] Only if the other is in itself the negative can self-consciousness' negating encounter affirm the being of this other in the negation and thus sublate the other. So for the sake of the independent existence of this other, this other needs to be a

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hiermit seiner selbst nur gewiß durch das Aufheben dieses Anderen, das sich ihm als selbstständiges Leben darstellt; es ist *Begierde*" (*PhG* 143).

[30] "Das Selbstbewußtsein vermag also durch seine negative Beziehung ihn [den anderen Gegenstand] nicht aufzuheben; es erzeugt ihn vielmehr wieder, so wie die Begierde" (*PhG* 143).

[31] The full sentence in German reads: "Um der Selbständigkeit des Gegenstandes willen kann es [das Selbstbewußtsein] daher zur Befriedigung nur gelangen, indem dieser selbst die Negation an ihm vollzieht, und er muß diese Negation seiner selbst an sich vollziehen, denn er ist *an sich* das Negative, und er muß für das Andere sein, was er ist" (*PhG* 144).

negating agency in itself and it needs to be carrying out this negation as a self-negation, so this other needs to be an other that is capable of turning on itself. As being an other that is capable of self-reflexivity in a negating way—in other words, capable of being an other to itself—and as existing independently at the same time, this other must be self-consciousness as well.

Self-consciousness thus can achieve satisfaction only in the encounter with another self-consciousness. So if we are to recapitulate the previous development, we can say that self-determination is only sustainable when self-consciousness as negating and canceling agency continuously negates and cancels and when the negation of otherness can be negated without sublating and eradicating the negation. This is precisely possible when the other is another self-consciousness, because the other as another self-consciousness is a negating agency as well, which means that the other's being other can be negated; because the other has the same structure, the other also is that same self-conscious negating agency. But the negation of otherness also has to be negated, and in this negation of the negation, the otherness is not eradicated but retained, because the other as other remains other to the first self-consciousness.

The perspective so far has been focusing on the first self-consciousness and rather disregarding that here intersubjectivity is revealed as a constitutive moment in subject formation. It is through the encounter with another self-consciousness that the first self-consciousness can come to a discovery of its own essential structure. Intersubjectivity is the context in and through which the experience of otherness and the turning against itself are facilitated and become what provides in the enactment of the self the necessary validation of the self in its existence as determinate and its own self. Hegel claims that "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (*PhS* ¶178).[32] The possibility for acknowledgment lies in the reflexivity of consciousness; its duplication, *Verdoppelung*, is the movement or process of recognition (*PhS* ¶178; *PhG* 146). Recognition is a movement or process that involves a duplication of the one who is being acknowledged or recognized; hence, recognition is neither something that can be simply conferred nor a simple act, but it involves an

ambivalence that appears to be crucial to the efficacy of bringing about recognition, and hence also the subject, which—as Hegel tells us—can only be as *anerkanntes*, as acknowledged and recognized.

The self is itself another, and the cost of this being itself another is a loss of itself, because only through its loss can it then find and recognize itself as another. But the otherness of the other is sublated in the movement of recognition for the self to recognize *itself* in the other.[33] The reciprocity of the relationship between the subject and the other entails the subject's seeing the other as same and being seen as same by the other. Butler emphasizes the creative dimension of the act of reciprocal recognition that institutes a self-understanding of both self-consciousnesses as authors and creators of the other's being. By virtue of this mutuality, "desire here loses its character as a purely consumptive activity, and becomes characterized by the ambiguity in which two self-consciousnesses affirm their respective autonomy (independence) and alienation (otherness)" (*SD* 50-51). The "ambiguity" is the generative activity of desire that exposes self-consciousness as desire, because in its striving for self-subsistence, self-consciousness in desiring the other becomes other to itself and in desiring to "return to itself" it loses the other. Desire exposes the self-reflexive subject as both an agency of negating negativity, but also of productivity in reciprocity.

In *Subjects of Desire* Butler focuses on the rhetorical structure by which the journey of the Hegelian subject is enacted. Together with her later works, where she elaborates more on the performative efficacy of the rhetorical dimension, it becomes possible to read her reading of Hegel as offering an account of the self-conscious subject emerging through the reflexive turn of consciousness performed in the turn to the other. The account thus offers a story of the origin of the subject, but the origin—

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[32] "Das Selbstbewußtsein ist an und für sich, indem und dadurch, daß es für ein Anderes an und für sich ist; d. h. es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes" (*PhG* 145).

[33] The pertinent passage in Hegel's *Phenomenology* reads as follows in the German original: "Es ist für das Selbstbewußtsein ein anderes Selbstbewußtsein; es ist außer sich gekommen. Dies hat die gedoppelte Bedeutung: erstlich, es hat sich selbst verloren, denn es findet sich als ein anderes Wesen; zweitens, es hat damit das Andere aufgehoben, denn es sieht auch nicht das Andere als Wesen, sondern sich selbst im Anderen.

"Es muß dies sein Anderssein aufheben; dies ist das Aufheben des ersten Doppelsinns und darum selbst ein zweiter Doppelsinn; erstlich, es muß darauf gehen, das andere selbständige Wesen aufzuheben, um dadurch seiner als des Wesens gewiß zu werden; zweitens geht es hiermit darauf, sich selbst aufzuheben, denn dies Andere ist es selbst" (*PhG* 145).

presumed as giving rise, causing the account as its effect—is itself an effect of the effect, i.e., the account, and becomes causal and original only afterwards, belatedly by the instantiation of the effect. So the story has already begun as it begins, as in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where the subject only arrives belatedly on the scene— instantiated by the account of itself, exposing the original scene of its emergence only as original insofar as it is already evacuated. In the account of itself, only by being turned back on itself does self-consciousness constantly come to emerge.

If we now return to desire as a mode of becoming, we can with Butler understand desire as a tropological movement. Desire, always both intentional and reflexive, can be said to be a turning, a tropological movement that is a double movement of the turning to the other and on itself. Precisely this turning is what sustains desire. By reading *Subjects of Desire* together with Butler's later work, it is plausible to extend this claim to argue that the turning that produces the subject also produces the desire; neither precedes the other. This is where the paradox of referentiality in subjection becomes clear, because it is necessary to refer to that which does not yet exist, namely, the subject of desire. In other words, for desire to appear seems to presuppose a desiring subject, but this subject—the supposed cause and source of desire—is itself read as an effect of precisely this activity of desiring. "Desire" therefore is a fundamental notion in subject formation because it is not only the dynamic force that fuels and sustains the subject's subsistence, but is also a fundamental modality of the subject's continuous emergence and self-dispossession. Desire is that which traverses the subject as the mode of its own self-dispossession and which instantiates subject formation in Hegel's narrative as a "comedy of errors" (*SD* 196) moving the subject through various scenes of unexpected loss and retrieval. The subject emerges as a self-conscious subject, insofar as consciousness comes to self-reflective reflexivity, but consciousness becoming aware of itself has not been at the end of its journey, but instead has emerged in another transformation as dependent on the recognition by another self-consciousness.

In addition to traversing and dispossessing the subject, rather than being the subject's forceful and authentic expression of itself, desire emerges by far not as a merely cognitive desire detached from its bodily connotations. Desire and self-reflexivity in Hegel only work through and on the body. This aspect of the body as a constant site of contestation where self-consciousness and hence being and becoming

a subject are negotiated is at the core of Butler's revisiting of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in *Psychic Life of Power*. Hegel's concept of a subjection that is a negating activity is tacitly presupposed as a self-negating *attachment* that, regarding its operativeness, can be structurally linked with the Freudian notion of libidinal investment, as Butler finds. Furthermore, she traces "the ineluctability of the attachment of and to the body in subjection" (*PL* 34) in Hegel's account of the "Unhappy Consciousness" in connection with the argument that the Foucaultian examination of subjection remains influenced by Hegel. Butler thus offers a reading of Hegel through a Freudo-Foucaultian lens concerning the production of the body as prison of consciousness in the process of the emergence of the subject as self-conscious.

1.2 Self-consciousness and the Ineluctability of Bodies and Desires

Central to Butler's reading of Hegel's lord-bondsman narrative and the section on the unhappy consciousness is the issue of the "suppression of the body" (*PL* 33) as necessary in the process of becoming a self-reflexive subject. The suppression as liberation from the external authority of the lord is a self-subjection to the norms and ideals already present in the world in which the bondsman finds himself. This suppression of the body that is the condition for the emergence of the subject is a functionalization of the body that works only through the body. Therefore, the result of the attempted suppression of the body is its reproduction and preservation in this movement and passionate investment in the body.

The reading of Hegel that Butler presents is one emphasizing the aspect of materiality and production in the light of a theory of the performative insofar as lord and bondsman as subjects are instituted by their performance of their interdependent roles. The bondsman's role, which defines and enacts him in his existence, is that of "an instrumental body whose labor provides for the material conditions of the lord's existence, and whose material products reflect both the subordination of the bondsman and the domination of the master" (*PL* 35). The lord is cast as the one who subordinates the bondsman while at the same time depends on the bondsman, since

the latter is the one to sustain the material condition for the lord's existence. The instrumentalization of the bondsman *as* "body requires in effect that the bondsman *be* the lord's body, but be it in such a way that the lord forgets or disavows his own activity in producing the bondsman" (*PL* 35). This disavowal makes it possible for the lord to emerge as disembodied desire for self-reflection, a desire that requires the bondsman to be the "other" who, as another consciousness, is an effect of autonomy. Thus, the essential relation between lord and bondsman, namely, the relation through which the lord produced the bondsman, has to be denied, because for self-consciousness to emerge, mutual and equal recognition is required for a dependent consciousness such as the bondsman cannot provide (see *PhS* ¶191-2; *PhG* 151-2).

Butler's own narrative of bondsman and lord posits the bondsman as the body and the lord as consciousness or cognition, and one could also suggest that we find here an inquiry into the condition of the possibility of the *Körpervergessenheit* (bodily oblivion) of Western theories of the subject that is a *Körperversessenheit* (obsession with the body/bodily obsession) at the same time. Avowedly, however, Butler's project is to trace the intersections and inversions of power and desire in Hegel that become psychic reality and thus to account for the splitting of the psyche through which interiority and exteriority—or, in other words, the self-conscious subject in relation to its body as other—are produced. Although this seems to imply that interiority could simply be equated with the self-conscious subject and exteriority with the body, the relation and distinction between interiority and exteriority in the course of the argument turn out to be not so clearly determinable. Entering the sequence of lordship and bondage, Butler's question is how it is possible for the lord to disavow or forget his essential relation with the bondsman. In order for the disavowal to work, it is necessary that, on the one hand, the bondsman's labor remains to be recognized as the bondsman's own and, on the other hand, that the products of the bondsman's labor, the objects stemming from his labor, not be recognized as the bondsman's own products. If it is presumed that "[h]is labor produces a visible and legible set of marks in which the bondsman reads back from the object a confirmation of his own formative activity" (*PL* 36), then in order for the lord to claim the products as his own in the act of denying the activity of the production, a certain kind of erasure and resignification has to take place (see *PL* 38-39). The bondsman's activity is "his *own formative* activity" (*PL* 36; my emphasis) insofar as it is what forms him or, in other

words, that which gives rise to his existence. This activity as an activity of the production of a body is required by the "contract" between master and bondsman in which the bondsman is forced to be the lord's body, but at the same time the bondsman is also forced not to let the lord know that he only is who he is due to the denied pact between them.

The condition for the bondsman's existence, therefore, is his belonging to the master; but this relationship cannot be avowed for two reasons. Firstly, the relationship of dependence is not equal and mutual and thus cannot function as a relationship of proper recognition, because "the moment is lacking, that what the lord does to the other he also does to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself he should also do to the other" (*PhS* ¶191).[34] Secondly, avowing the contract between lord and bondsman in which the bondsman substitutes his body for the lord's would mean that the bondsman's body would be disclosed as the lord's body, which consequently means divulging the lord's embodiment. The desire for recognition, however, is also exposed as a disembodied desire for self-reflection insofar as it necessitates the negation of bodily existence in order to achieve the pure abstraction of being-for-self (see *PhS* ¶186).

This pure abstraction, however, turns out not to be realized factually but only mimed: "The presentation (*Darstellung*) of itself, however, as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence*, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life" (*PhS* ¶187).[35] Considering that the German reads *Darstellung* for *presentation*, the connotation of artistic presentation or performance comes to the fore even more than in the English. Thus, the detachment from the particularity of existence or even life as such is not the condition of the subject as such, but the detachment is bound to an *enactment or self-stylization* of the subject as "pure abstraction," disembodied and disinterested in life.

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[34] The German original reads: "Aber zum eigentlichen Anerkennen fehlt das Moment, daß, was der Herr gegen den anderen tut, er auch gegen sich selbst tut, und was der Knecht gegen sich, er auch gegen den Anderen tue" (*PhG* 152).

[35] The German here reads: "Die *Darstellung* seiner aber als der reinen Abstraktion des Selbstbewußtseins besteht darin, sich als reine Negation seiner gegenständlichen Weise zu zeigen, oder es zu zeigen, an kein bestimmtes *Dasein* geknüpft, an die allgemeine Einzelheit des Daseins überhaupt nicht, nicht an das Leben geknüpft zu sein" (*PhG* 148).

This *Darstellung* of itself as independent from its bodily life and thus also as vulnerability is a mimetic enactment in which the subject turns out to believe as reality what is enacted and so in the mimetic move a second mimetic move has to be implied, namely, the forgetting of the subject that it merely presented itself as not attached to life.

This detachment is necessary because in the next step of the argument we learn that the struggle for recognition is a life-and-death struggle and that if the subject did not make itself believe its disinterest into its life, it would not dare to enter into this struggle that awards life for the fear of its life. But in this struggle one precisely has to risk one's life and only through the existential dimension of risk and fear can one achieve and experience the full meaning of recognition. Here the subject becomes aware of having fooled itself in its presenting itself as disinterested in its life, and this self-stylization is exposed as a dissimulating act in the moment in which the struggle for recognition is entered and there is a body to be annihilated and a life to be lost. Yet this entering into the struggle would not have been possible had it not been for the subject's casting itself as independent from specific existence and bodily life, because then it would just have fled from the other and avoided risking its life and itself.

The relationship between lord and bondsman that resulted from struggle cannot be captured as an ongoing relationship of a dynamic contestation, because this relationship emerged as a relationship that had to be immediately disavowed. If the relationship were avowed as a relationship of mutual dependency, then the lord would have to admit dependence on material bodily life, which would unmask the impossibility of satisfaction of the desire for unchangeability and integrity. The peculiarity of the situation is that the lord depends on the fiction of his independence from the bondsman; the dependency can only be avowed in one way—the bondsman is bound by the lord and this relation has to figure as essential to the bondsman's being, as otherwise he could simply walk away, but the lord in turn has to live the fiction of his relation to the bondsman as being purely accidental. That said, the relationship of belonging that has to be avowed is the relationship between the bondsman and the products of his labor in order for the bondsman to exist as an autonomous being, and "only by miming and covering over that labor can the bondsman appear to be both active and autonomous" (*PL* 36-37). This means that the dissimulation has the bondsman's autonomy as its effect that is enacted through his

productivity and reflected in the objects his labor brings forth. The fascinating aspect about this move is that the mimed autonomy will turn out to be the precondition of the bondsman's real autonomy, but this autonomy can only become real because of the bondsman's laboring on objects and thus achieving his self-realization in objects.

On the one hand, the object that carries the mark of the bondsman, therefore, in a sense, is really *his* own object, because the object is marked, or signed by him, by the labor of his hands. On the other hand, the object is already the lord's, since the bondsman has made the object only because it was to become the lord's own. As the lord assumes ownership over the object, the bondsman's signature is erased and written over. This reduplication of ownership that takes place in the form of an expropriation followed by an appropriation enacted by the lord nevertheless leads to a sense of self-recognition of the bondsman, since through working on the thing and forming it, the bondsman becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to him. The bondsman consequently can recognize his activity from the objects of his labor, but he cannot recognize his ownership from his signature on the object, since it has been erased and written over by the lord's signature. He can recognize himself and his ownership, though, negatively in the expropriation that poses a "*threat to* autonomy ... achieved through the experience of *absolute fear*" (*PL* 39; emphasis in original). Through the existential struggle, it has become clear that it is precisely the experience of threat and fear that invests that which is feared with importance, but which also engenders new life.

At this point, there is a convergence in the perspectives of bondsman and lord, as they are both subject to the experience of existential fear, insofar as they both experience ownership as threatened and unstable. Lord as well as bondsman over and over produces the experience of "the loss of the object and, with that loss, the experience of a fearful transience" (*PL* 39). The bondsman's encounters this loss in the extinguishing of his mark on the object and so the extinguishing of the object as *his* through the resignification and consumption of the object by the lord. The lord— Butler contends—experiences the loss of the object due to his consumption of the object, since for him, "occupying the position of pure consumption, objects were transitory, and he himself was defined as a series of transitory desires. For the lord, then, nothing seemed to last, except perhaps his own consuming activity, his endless

desire" (*PL* 39). But for the lord it seems precisely not possible to find consistency and security in the continuous dissatisfaction.

In Hegel's account of the relationship of the bondsman and the lord, it seems odd that the significant difference between lord and bondsman is precisely that the bondsman turns out to be the form of self-consciousness that can pass to the next stage because this self-consciousness has suffered "absolute fear" (*PhS* ¶196; "absolute Furcht" [*PhG* 155]) or existential fear. Why—one wants to ask Hegel—would the lord not need to fear that at any point the bondsman might rise against him and reappropriate the object? So it would seem that the lord also experiences loss and existential fear when the bondsman's action is disclosed as unessential and thus that the recognition that results from this relation is one-sided and unequal. The decisive difference materializes as the labor that the bondsman can perform but the lord does not. The lord seems to stand for self-consciousness' still desiring and believing in the possibility of attaining independence from material existence and otherness. But in order to achieve this project, subjecting an other, the bondsman, turns out to be *necessary*, and at the same time this necessity and hence also the accompanying anxiety and fear have to be disavowed. Thus, there is otherness that cannot be externalized and recognized and thus cannot be controlled. It is interesting that in Hegel real recognition is bound up with materiality and with otherness that needs to be independent, and, furthermore, in order for recognition to be real at this stage of his narrative, it seems to be necessary that the precariousness of the relationship through which recognition is negotiated and conferred be real as well. Moreover, Hegel relates to us that the recognizing other has to be an equal for recognition to work. Thus, the lord-bondsman relationship cannot bring about true recognition, because of the asymmetry of that relationship and even more so because of the impossibility of avowing the asymmetry and the material dependency in this asymmetry. Hence, the stageof lord and bondsman in the narrative of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has to be surpassed and sublated. And, ironically, it turns out that the bondsman will be the passageway to the next stage, since "[t]he *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman" (*PhS* ¶193).[36]

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[36] "Die *Wahrheit* des selbständigen Bewußtseins ist demnach das *knechtische Bewußtsein*" (*PhG* 152).

Work on an object, which characterizes the bondsman in his activity, means the formation of that object and "to give it form is to give it an existence that overcomes transitoriness" (*PL* 40). Through working, desire is fended off; "work," in Hegel's words, "is ... fleetingness staved off" (*PhS* ¶195).[37] Consumption, as the opposite of labor, is the *de*formation of the object through which permanence is negated. These notions of transience and negation do not only apply to the object produced by the bondsman and consumed by the lord, but to the subjects themselves: "The laboring body which knows itself to have formed the object also knows that it is *transient*. The bondsman not only negates things (in the sense of transforming them trough labor) and is a negating activity, but he is subject to a full and final negation in death" (*PL* 41). In the first sentence of this passage, it is not entirely clear whether the "it" denotes the "laboring body" or "the object"; this uncertainty makes it seem as if we are quietly passing from a reflective knowledge of the laboring body regarding the effects of its activity to a reflective knowledge regarding its own being. This movement of the laboring body becoming aware of its own activity as well as of the object as transient can—if we read these two aspects of awareness together—then be assumed to represent the bondsman's becoming cognizant of his own labor as a "negating activity."[38] The bondsman at the verge of fully recognizing his own being subject to death recognizes his overcoming this transience in his working in the face of death and demise. Therefore, through his work, the bondsman discovers himself as existing for himself and stubbornly "acquires a mind of his own" (*PhS* ¶196),[39] a self-will *(eigener Sinn)* in order not to have to realize that every aspect of his being is threatened by death.

The development of that stubborn will of his own *(Eigensinnigkeit)* is the moment of the emergence of the "unhappy consciousness" because the stubborn clinging of the

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[37] "Die Arbeit ... ist ... *aufgehaltenes* Verschwinden" (*PhG* 153).

[38] The importance and difficulty here is the reflexivity of the knowledge about the bondsman that seems to be implied in the passage. The link between the transience of the object and the transience of the bondsman—as it can be understood from an outside perspective—should be fairly clear, as Butler stressed earlier in her argument by showing how the bondsman's existence depends on his productive activity and the objects yielded. She reemphasizes this here by arguing: "If the object is the congealment or forming of labor, and if the labor is that of the bondsman, then the determinate and transient character of the thing will imply the determinate and transient character of the bondsman" (*PL* 41).

[39] The full sentence in German reads: "Es wird also durch dies Wiederfinden seiner durch sich selbst *eigener Sinn*, gerade in der Arbeit, worin es nur *fremder Sinn* zu sein schien" (*PhG* 154).

bondsman to himself is his reaction in the face of the terror of death. As clinging to *himself*, this *Eigensinnigkeit* is a reflexive turn to his own self, an *eigener Sinn* as *Eigensinn* (own self-will) of the bondsman. In this becoming aware of his being for himself through his formative activity, the bondsman throws off the lord as an external lord. However, this emancipation is still in the service of the desire of stability; the bondsman cannot simply avow the transience of his own body. Hence, this movement of throwing off the external lord becomes the means to labor on the transience of the bondsman's own body. So a reflexive movement against his own body emerges that is a subjection of his own body taking it as distinct and separate from consciousness. The lord-bondsman relationship turns out to be sublimated and yields a self-subjection. At this stage, there is no returning for the subject behind the awareness of his body and the importance of his bodily activity. This dimension of the bodily materiality and the dependence on the material world that has not been overcome by throwing off the external lord comes to figure as blemish and impurity. The knowledge of the lack of purity then engenders and intensifies the striving for purification. So the subject emerges as renouncing action and enjoyment through ritualistic practices such as "fastings and mortifications" (*PhS* ¶228; "Fasten und Kasteien" [*PhG* 175]) in order to get rid of the guilt of action ("*Schuld seines Tun*" [*PhG* 175]). These attempts to expiate the "guilt of action" are not acts of a desperate and exasperated subject, but rather in its smugness and *Eigensinn*, the subject is attached to precisely these rituals of self-purification and self-subjection and in return they are endowed with value. As a result, two institutions are set up internal to the psyche, a lordship and a bondage, and "the body is again dissimulated as an alterity, but ... this alterity is now interior to the psyche itself" (*PL* 42) and constitutes what Hegel presents under the title of the "unhappy consciousness."[40]

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[40] The setting up of two institutions within the subject, one that controls and the other one that responds to the ruling institution, is a figure that can be found again in Freud's ego ideal that emerges as an institution to which the ego responds. A further connection between Hegel and Freud can be drawn with regard to the role of the body and the body being that which is subjected, since the ego in Freud is established as being subjected to the ego ideal and the ego is introduced as a bodily ego; see Sigmund Freud, "Das Ich und das Es," *Gesammelte Werke* (Fankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1999) 13:235-289; "The Ego and the Id," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth P, 1953-74) 19:3-66.

In the face of the terror of death, the desire to displace that terror turns out to be what is driving the bondsman's self-subjecting activity. In her reading of this passage, Butler reminds us that the *Phenomenology* is not simply to be read as a story of the origin and telos of the world, but the *Phenomenology* comes to operate within an already existing world. So the bondsman is already implicated within a social world that is not merely waiting to be brought about and structured by the phenomenological bondsman. As he shakes off the lord, the bondsman thus necessarily finds himself not in an unprefigured world, but in a social world that is structured and functions through norms and rules, and these norms and rules are not only social, but they carry ethical and moral valence. When the activity to displace the fear of death then takes place as suppression of the body, because the body as transient and subject to death is that which has to be renounced, this bodily self-subjection is a subjection to and in accordance with the social norms and codes of morality.

The self-subjection and the restricted freedom of self-consciousness recovered through the activity of the bondsman are linked by Hegel to a stoical attitude, which he sees as a defensive practice of withdrawing from existence. Since this withdrawal on the one hand has to include the withdrawal of one's own existence but on the other hand presupposes something from which this negation becomes possible, stoicism as an attitude is self-contradictory. Skepticism, then, is the practical realization of stoicism, since it is the avowed negation of "the existence of everything as its own activity" (*PL* 44). This activity links back to absolute fear and the desire to displace it, since such activity appears as disembodied and clinging to that which is least corporeal, in other words, clinging to thought (*PL* 43). As an activity, however, it is tethered in the bodily and, therefore, the certainty achieved is one that irreparably remains a sense-certainty. The skeptic experiences freedom in the logical subversion of everything he encounters; he takes it, turns it into its contrary, and thus exposes the limit of the necessity of the other's position. Such expositions of others and their positions to their own limits to the point of their witnessing to their own contradictoriness is pleasurable for the skeptic, because at that moment skepticism, through its mimetic duplication of the self, provides a deceivingly safe and detached ground from which the witnessing can be observed and enjoyed. The skeptic's self-consciousness, however, will be exposed to its own contradictoriness, its being "nothing but a purely casual, confused medley, the dizziness of a perpetually self-

engendered disorder" (*PhS* ¶205)[41], and, as a result, the skeptical self-consciousness will rise to another level when the skeptic encounters another skeptic. This encounter exposes "the constitutive contradiction of his own negating activity" (*PL* 45) to the self-consciousness of the first skeptic and thus, according to Butler, "the unhappy consciousness emerges as an explicit form of ethical reflexivity" (*PL* 45). When Butler calls this subject emergence an "explicit form of ethical reflexivity," this seems to imply that for her the ethical is intimately, if not constitutively, connected with the notion of *Selbstverhältnis* (self-relation/relation to oneself/relation to one's self).

The question then would be in what ways the "unhappiness" of the consciousness carries moral and ethical valence, when the consciousness turns out to be an "unhappy" one, because the sadistic pleasure the skeptic could take in watching others witness to their contradictions depended on the possibility of detachment from the position and situation of the other. The act of the self's witnessing is dependent on a "mimetic reduplication of the self, and its 'dispassion' is belied by the passion of mimeticism" (*PL* 45). As a result, the sadistic pleasure taken in watching others falling into their contradictions is turned back upon consciousness itself, and as consciousness takes itself as the object of derision and ridicule, it painfully becomes aware of its own self-contradictory nature. Consciousness, therefore, appears in a dual structure, on the one hand as the one scorning and on the other hand as the object scorned. This duality denotes the division of consciousness into two parts, the scorning and watching are the unchangeable and "essential," whereas falling into contradiction and being scorned are the changeable and "inessential."

The problem is that the essential and the inessential are both consciousness' nature, but unhappy consciousness "is not as yet explicitly aware that this [duality] is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both" (*PhS* ¶207).[42] Contradicting the changeable, inessential part does not vanquish it, but rather in the negation that necessarily is a determinate negation, namely, of the inessential part in the name of the essential, the inessential is reproduced since it is presupposed for the negation to function. The economy of proliferation is encountered through which consciousness

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[41] "Dies Bewußtsein ist ... nur eine schlechthin zufällige Verwirrung, der Schwindel einer sich immer erzeugenden Unordnung" (*PhG* 161).

[42] "[E]s *für sich* ist sich noch nicht dieses Wesen selbst, noch nicht die Einheit beider" (*PhG* 164).

then comes to agonize over its life, action, and existence in the impossibility to overcome the enemy. The experience of this pain, however, is quite ambiguous and exposes the body as a site of contestation, because for this pain to be perceptible, there has to be a body that can be in pain; the body hence is preserved its subjection, yet the body is clearly determined as the enemy that has to be vanquished.

The movement in which the unhappy consciousness seeks to overcome this changeable, inessential part of itself is the movement towards becoming one with the incarnate unchangeable. The incarnate unchangeable is encountered as individuality, but still as other than the individual consciousness itself. The incarnate unchangeable remains always beyond actuality precisely owing to its taking on definite form, Hegel argues, a probable allusion to the incarnation of Christ. Christ becoming human is as truly human and yet utterly beyond the world insofar as his nature also is fully divine at the same time. The kind of body that the unchangeable thus has assumed is a purified body, and when the unhappy consciousness strives for "[t]he initially external relation to the incarnate Unchangeable as an alien ... to be transformed into a relation in which it becomes absolutely one with it" (*PhS* ¶213)[43], this striving is one for a pure and pristine body cleansed from all worldly bodily desires and functions.

The effort through which consciousness endeavors to achieve unity with the unchangeable is a threefold movement, where the first and the second attempts turn out to prove themselves unsuitable to fulfill the task. Firstly, the subject strives for unchangeability by subordinating its own body to the *thought* of the essential. This "purifying effort" is called *Andacht* (devotion) by Hegel, and, as Butler explains, as a "form of self-immersion, it is also a continuation of self-beratement as self-mortification" (*PL* 47). But this effort leads merely to painful self-sensation since in devotion the subject merely moves *towards* the ideal, but fails to become one with it. It is notable that the body is compelled to embody the ideal to which it is being subjected. This implies that a movement of identification has to take place here, and with the problematic of identification another dialectic is introduced, namely, one of passivity and activity. But in subject formation the relation between passive patients and active agents in the formative process is subverted and instead rendered dynamic.

It is impossible to capture the body as a utterly passive entity that is subjected and upon which consciousness and through consciousness normative ideals labor. There has to be some active moment if this formation also includes a process of identification, a taking-up of a position. Furthermore, the fluidity between activity and passivity also is a consequence of recasting the differentiation between body and consciousness, as both are implied within each other by understanding consciousness as an inevitably bodily consciousness.

The idealization that consciousness requires of the body is not achieved, because the action turns out to be nothing but "the inward movement of the pure heart which *feels* itself, but agonizingly self-divided, the movement of an infinite yearning which is certain that its essence is such a pure heart" (*PhS* ¶217).[44] Thus, the gain of the whole agonizing process of self-beratement and bodily subjection lies in the painful certainty of the "heart's purity." In the process of turning against the desiring and changeable body, the "pure heart" assures itself of its own purity; this purity is in a way exposed as even more pristine than expected in the failure to easily purify the body. But at the same time, this unity with the unchangeable that would mean having a pure body is removed to the unreachable beyond, because the certainty of the "pure heart," in other words, the certainty of consciousness' being truly one with the ideal, is attained at the cost of realizing one's own bodily insufficiency even more severely. To assert and ensure its own purity, consciousness requires the pain of the body. Hence, this certainty of the "pure heart" can only be retained by repetitively ensuring the purity of the heart against the impurity of the body; thus, achieving the ideal of a pure body would jeopardize the pure heart in its self-certainty.

Therefore, the pure heart, the essential consciousness, has to assure itself of itself by assuring itself of the impurity of the body. The ideal to which the body is subjected therefore has to remain unreachable, and the body cannot be allowed to satisfactorily approximate it. But in this very movement, it turns out that in trying to subject the body to the ideal in devotion, all that happened was that the impurity of the body was

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[43] "Die zunächst äußere Beziehung aber zu dem gestalteten Unwandelbaren als einem fremden Wirklichen hat es zum absoluten Einswerden zu erheben" (*PhG* 167).

[44] "Es ist hierdurch die innerliche Bewegung des *reinen* Gemüts vorhanden, welches sich selbst, aber als die Entzweiung schmerzhaft *fühlt*; die Bewegung einer unendlichen *Sehnsucht*, welche die Gewißheit hat, daß ihr Wesen ein solches reines Gemüt ist" (*PhG* 169).

exposed, and so "instead of laying hold of the essence, it only *feels* it and has fallen back into itself" (*PhS* ¶217).[45] To feel is the exposure of the failure, because feeling is the self-reflexivity of the body and thus the proliferation of the body in consciousness that thus cannot move beyond its split duality in devotion. This activity turns into a kind of narcissism, as Butler argues, precisely because the project devotion ends up taking as its object the bodily self in the self-feeling and thus returns to that which it was striving to abnegate.[46]

The second strategy arises from the unhappy consciousness' finding its transitoriness in experiencing itself as a working and desiring self. The servile consciousness stubbornly clinging to its own self found confirmation of itself in its laboring, but in order for the body to overcome its changeablity that is signified through its activity and desire, it needs to embody that ideal of unchangeability to which it is subjected. This means that the subject has to get rid of the self-aggrandizing confirmation found in the laboring activity. Working has to become a kind of self-beratement so that the subject "may find in it confirmation, but only confirmation of what it is *for itself*, viz. of its dividedness" (*PhS* ¶218; "Bewährung desjenigen, was es für sich ist, nämlich seiner Entzweiung" [*PhG* 170]). The actuality of the things, the world that is negated through labor and desire, hence becomes more than merely that which is nothing for consciousness and merely worthy to be consumed and annihilated. The world also becomes "a sanctified world" (*PhS* ¶219; "geheiligte Welt" [*PhG* 171]), because in it consciousness recognizes the form of the unchangeable that gives and surrenders itself freely. The sanctification of the world is the effect of the unchangeable's incarnation; again, in Hegel's formulation, one can easily read the idea of the incarnation of Christ. "The Unchangeable's having *surrendered* its embodied form, and having *relinquished* it for the enjoyment of

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[45] The German here reads: "statt das Wesen zu ergreifen, *fühlt* es [das Bewusstsein] nur und ist in sich zurückgefallen" (*PhG* 169). In the English version, the feeling of consciousness is qualified as feeling the essence that could not be assumed; in the German version, all that is said is that consciousness is merely capable of feeling and thus fails to transcend itself. The difference is minor for the argument presented here; however, with regard to the question of the noematic dimension of feeling, the English version could lead to a stronger interpretation than the German allows.

[46] Here another parallel to psychoanalysis can be drawn with regard to the connection between narcissism and aggressiveness. It becomes very obvious from the preceding discussion how the economy of the attachment to one's own ego in the context of this ego's subjection to the ego ideal also brings forth aggressiveness against oneself, against the beloved ego.

consciousness" (*PhS* ¶220)[47] enables another approach to work and consumption and to the subject's relation to the world through work and consumption. Because it is the unchangeable that *enables* the subject to work and consume, the ground of the subject's action is not itself, is not its body, but the unchangeable to which it owes its activity. Activity thus is understood as "a gift from an alien source" (*PhS* ¶220; "eine fremde Gabe" [*PhG* 171]). In its acting, the subject then is juxtaposed between two extremes; on the one hand, it is there as *tätiges Diesseits* (see *PhG* 171), as active worldliness,[48] and on the other hand, it also is passive actuality. The body then becomes the medium of reevaluation and transformation and the site where the two extremes are mediated.

The purifying effort, then, is a double sacrifice: the essential consciousness renounces and relinquishes its purity in avowing its connection with the inessential desiring and laboring consciousness. The inessential consciousness, the body, in turn, "*gives thanks* [for the gift], i.e. *denies* itself the satisfaction of being conscious of its *independence*" (*PhS* ¶222; "*dankt*, d.h. die Befriedigung des Bewußtsein seiner *Selbständigkeit* sich *versagt*" [*PhG* 172]), and in this self-denial in giving thanks, it asserts the unchangeable beyond as grounds for its capability to desire and act. But this effort to renounce the self turns out to fail, precisely because to be self-renunciation, it necessarily needs to be a self-willed action, and thus in the performance of the renunciation, the self is reestablished as the grounds for action. The question that arises again at this point is how passivity is to be thought. Letting something happen to oneself, then, still has to be understood as entailing an active aspect, namely, *letting* something happen. Absolute passivity could be traced in undergoing an action in which the letting something happen is not a necessary aspect whereby the undergoing is inflicted, not self-willed, overwhelming. This means that passivity as pure passivity then entails a certain degree of violence, because otherwise

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[47] The entire sentence in the German original reads here: "[I]ndem es [das Bewußtsein] zwar zur Vernichtung der Wirklichkeit und zum Genusse gelangt, so geschieht für es dies wesentlich dadurch, daß das Unwandelbare selbst seine Gestalt *preisgibt* und ihm zum Genusse überlässt" (*PhG* 171).

[48] The English translation adjectivizes the German noun phrase and speaks of consciousness as "actively present" (*PhS* ¶221). "Present," however, does not adequately reflect the German *Diesseits*, which also denotes "this life" and "this world," as opposed to the next life and eternity.

the undergoing subject's letting the action happen would be a necessary condition for the action to take place.[49]

Pleasure is not completely obliterated through the primary denial of the pleasure gained from consumption; since the denial was a self-*willed* action, there was desire, namely, desire for the denial of consumption, and this desire has been satisfied. Thus, pleasure and desire have been proliferated in the subjection of the body that is a self-absorption. This pleasure that this "self-absorption" gives is a "negative narcissism" (see *PL* 50), because it is "an engaged preoccupation with what is most debased and defiled about it [the consciousness]" (*PL* 50). In this negative narcissism, consciousness returns into itself, into its bodily self, becoming fully "aware of itself as *this actual individual* in the animal functions" (*PhS* ¶225)[50] in which "the enemy" exposes himself. These "animal," bodily functions hence are no longer just performed with the normal casualness, but they become predominant object of consciousness' endeavors. In this preoccupation with the body and its functions, they are reproduced rather than reduced to nothing, and the contact with them is tightened rather than overcome. Consequently, consciousness "for ever sees itself as defiled" (*PhS* ¶225; "sich immer verunreinigt erblickt" [*PhG* 174]), and "we have here only a personality confined to its own self and its petty actions, a personality brooding over itself, as wretched as it is impoverished" (*PhS* ¶225).[51]

At this point, the third movement of the effort to purify the unhappy consciousness is taken. The crucial moment is the mediation of the attempt to directly vanquish the changeable through the thought of the unchangeable. The position and task of mediation and redirection of the destructive activity are taken by a being that is conscious itself. This mediator then is cast as the priestly *Diener* (minister) who

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[49] An example for passivity is being interpellated, being called into existence by the other without giving the other prior permission to do so. But in interpellation, subject formation is understood in the mode of the subject's being called upon, being named and so being called into existence; the transformation between passivity and activity then happens as the interpellated subject exceeds the name through which it was called into existence and reappropriates the power that subjected and subjectivated it. Reading Emmanuel Levinas in order to think about subject formation, as will happen in future chapters, offers a further shift in thinking about passivity and the priority of the other, as for Levinas the priority of the other is a priority that is not simply ethical or logical, but a kind of priority that is prior to all logic and ethics and that renders the scene of subject formation one of pure passivity, a passivity beyond the opposition of passivity and activity.

[50] "Seiner als *dieses wirklichen Einzelnen* ist das Bewußtsein sich in den tierischen Funktionen bewußt" (*PhG* 174).

extinguishes and fully cancels the renunciation performed by consciousness. Consciousness is absolved from its deeds and desires through giving its freedom of decision over to the mediator. Thus, the subject's actions are no longer regarded as its own because the subject's will has been given into the hands of the priest. The priest then redeems the subject from the "responsibility for its own action" (*PhS* ¶228; "*Schuld* seines Tuns" [*PhG* 175]); in the German original, the subject is not merely responsible for its deeds, but also *guilty* of them. The redemption through the rituals of bodily purification due to the strange kind of guilt is even more pressing because the defilement is more severe than simply being the responsible agent. Since the body cannot be absolutely annihilated, ritualistic relinquishment is necessary, which takes place in the form of fasting and mortification as self-punishment.

Self-punishment in this movement, according to Hegel, does not lead to a self-aggrandizing falling back into itself of consciousness, because "finally through the positive moment of practising of what it does not understand, it truly deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists *for itself*" (*PhS* ¶229).[52] The notion of practicing what one does not understand can be correlated with the notion of *habitus* as a bodily hexis that is acquired by practicing without prior coming to fully grasp that which sediments in practice.[53] The lack of self-assertion in and through the action of self-renunciation ensures that the action retains its character of an actual sacrifice that can absolve consciousness from its misery. Because consciousness cannot assert itself, the minister is essential in his attesting to the incomplete certainty. For the subject, its action, desire, and enjoyment remain agonizing experiences, and the attestation of the priest thus has to keep

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[51] "[S]o sehen wir nur eine auf sich und ihr kleines Tun beschränkte und sich bebrütende, ebenso unglückliche als ärmliche Persönlichkeit" (*PhG* 174).

[52] "[E]ndlich [durch] (sic) das positive Moment des Treibens eines unverstandenen Geschäftes nimmt es sich in Wahrheit und vollständig das Bewußtsein der inneren und äußeren Freiheit, der Wirklichkeit als seines *Fürsichseins*" (*PhG* 175). Another set of questions would concern theology, since theology seems very receptive to this concept of the redeeming aspect of practicing what one does not understand with regard to justification. The interesting problematic then is what it means for theology that this kind of redeeming practice is a self-punishment and self-castigation.

[53] If such acting "beyond one's understanding" figures as a redeeming practice, several questions arise. One particular set of questions would be what it means for a theory of ethics if actions are evaluated as good precisely on the condition that the agent cannot count as being in charge of them, because it could not will the action. The valorization of "blind attachment" to some kind of ideal frames a specific problematic for thinking about ethics and the question of responsibility and accountability. But at this point it is also

gesturing towards the eschatological fulfillment of the promise that the pains of this world will be null and naught in the next world. This attestation remains continuously beyond grasp for the subject, which renders the certainty incomplete; consequently, the process of self-renunciation has to be repeated continuously. The necessity of attestation that is mediated through another subject brings again to the fore the context of intersubjectivity as a necessary condition for subject formation.

Butler, however, is less interested in the resolution of the misery of the unhappy consciousness and its redemption than in the economy of desire and proliferation of the body in the efforts to subject the body. She asks about the analysis of consciousness before the introduction of the mediator in which "[e]very effort to overcome the body, pleasure, and agency proves to be nothing other than the assertion of precisely those features of the subject" (*PL* 53).[54] Her interest is the connection that can be drawn to the arguments of Nietzsche, Freud, and Foucault with regard to how the body emerges as a site of contestation where desires and norms are intersecting functions in subject formation.

The subject emerges as a self-conscious subject through and within the circle of all efforts to suppress and purify the body, resulting in the opposite of their aim, namely, in the preservation and reproduction of desire, will, and body. These efforts turn out to be self-congratulatory and self-aggrandizing actions because they are undertaken in the sign and with the aim of the purified, ideal, ascetic desire, will, and body. The self-conscious subject emerges through the dialectic framework of purification and proliferation, because a self-awareness is coming into existence exactly through this turn against itself in the incessant proliferation of renunciation and affirmation. This formative turn against itself is a turn against the body that has to be castigated because it is perceived as not conforming to the ideal, a certain accepted

necessary to remind oneself that the *Phenomenology* is written as a progressive narrative and one cannot simply extract one certain stage and read that stage as definitive.

[54] Even in the situation in which the priestly mediator is present, the subject's attempt to rid itself of its body, pleasure, and agency cannot uncritically be accepted as successful precisely because the practice of negation as a determinate negation will proliferate that which is negated and renounced. However, the scene that is expanded to the dimension of intersubjectivity shows that, with the help of this social context, the subject need not become conscious of its actual failure. Embedding the drama within a social context seems to enable successful deployment of repression and displacement of investments.

set of norms, *and* because it becomes perceivable as one's *own* body; the turn against the body, therefore, is the turn against oneself.

The problem or paradox of a turning that yields precisely that which it seems to presuppose is affirmed by Butler as a linguistic and epistemological problem. By doing so, she suspends the ontological dimension, in order to inquire into the relation between the linguistic and the ontological dimension. This does not mean that bodies are suddenly no longer "real," but it becomes possible for us to inquire how we come to understand our bodies as real. The paradox of the tropological turn's performativity appears paradoxical precisely because the phrase "one's own" suggests that there is a person, fully aware and cognizant of his or her actions, as well as of the actions of turning against him- or herself in subjecting his or her body. Yet this turn is said to bring about the subject in the first place. In inquiring into the process of subject formation, ordinary grammar forces and seduces us to speak of the different stages as if they were separable and strictly consecutive. And it is tempting to say that *in praxis* one can never divide them or establish a temporal sequence of their development, as if these were stages following each other. But Butler insists that the problem is not merely a practical one, insofar as if we were only able to be precise enough—if we could merely speak differently and better—then the paradox would no longer appear as a paradox. Rather, Butler reads the impossibility to make easily sense of the temporality subject formation and the material efficacy of subjection as symptomatic for how precisely subject formation emerges at the limits of our ability to make sense and speak logically coherently of it. With a linear text the problem of referentiality arises, because by saying that the subject comes into existence through the turn against itself, because the body is recognized as the own body, it is then a linguistic necessity to fill the subject position, and this seems to presuppose some sort of subject that preexists the turn in order for it to make the turn. Butler's argument, however, is precisely that turn and subject are coextensive.

Unlike in Hegel, where the body was a given, a material necessity, the body— important here is that this is the body as an intelligible body—is not simply a natural given, but it is produced, regulated, and sustained in a domain of the bodily that itself is produced, regulated, and sustained by precisely the economy of desire and

renunciation.[55] The regulations that produce and reproduce the domain of the bodily accordingly also invest the domain of the body as a site of possibilities of resistance, because to control, regulate, and punish, a regime of regulations produces the very activities that it attempts to control. This regime of regulations is discursive insofar as the regulations are circulated discursively and insofar as they operate by delimiting, signifying, and investing with meaning operating according to certain logics. The regulations thus are structured, enforced, and proliferated discursively, and for Foucault one of the exemplary discourses for this production through regulation is the discourse of confession. In the discourse of confession, desire continuously exceeds the regulatory power by which it is generated, because as it is to be controlled and punished, it is at the same time invoked and mobilized.[56] Body and desire do not precede regulation, but they are produced in the very effort of regulation as the object of regulation.

This departure from Hegel is key to Butler's own theory, because it is exactly in this "proliferation" that Butler locates "the site of potential resistance to regulation" (*PL* 60), because in the repetition a break necessarily happens through which the reiteration becomes the reiteration. The effects, however, of this proliferation, produced by the regime of norms orchestrating the regulation, are unforeseeable. If the effects of the proliferation are unforeseeable and so are to provide a possibility for resistance, it is necessary that there is a gap between the cause (i.e., the regulation) and the effect. This is what Butler calls "detachability of desire," when, in her reading of Foucault, she refers to desires as having "the capacity, central to the notion of resistance, to *exceed* the regulatory aims for which they were produced" (*PL* 60). Furthermore, the norms and ideals through which the body is formed themselves are not a pregiven in the form of prediscursive entities or economies. Rather, this economy of regulation and thus the regime of the norms and ideals itself is produced through the cultivation of a strange desire, namely, the passionate attachment to subjection. Here we are encountering the aspect of desire that it does not just go away

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[55] Although a connection can be drawn between the notion of "intelligible body" to the "Leib" (flesh, body perceived as one's body) of the phenomenological tradition, the two concepts cannot be cast as coinciding, because the focus of "Leib" is on the self-reflexive and self-reflective formation of the body, while the focus of "intelligible body" is more general, on the psychic and social signification process that renders the body perceivable as such by a logic of exclusion.

or give up if its first object-choice is being foreclosed. Because desire in its structure is always also the desire to desire, and because as Hegel exposed to us desire as the fundamental desire for life, life in itself as pure and independent subsistence, desire has to desire conditions of the possibility of continuing desiring. This is where the emergent self-consciousness as desire is exploitable and vulnerable, because in its necessity to be and become in and through desire, it is willing to attach itself to that which castigates desire and forecloses it. In Hegel this is found in the attachment to wretchedness and self-chastising in the attachment to bodily subjection.

The movement encountered here raises several questions that lead into Butler's turning to psychoanalysis to inquire into this strange attachment to subjection that is subjectivation. The strange preservation of the suppressed in the very act of suppression recurs in Freud "in his analysis of neurosis as a kind of libidinal attachment to a prohibition which nevertheless thwarts libidinal gratification" (*PL* 57). A parallel between this process of transferring the attachment from the desired object to the prohibition that takes exactly that object as its object and Hegel's notion of *Eigensinnigkeit* or stubborn self-willed attachment can be suggested. That stubborn will of one's own *(Eigensinnigkeit)* is the splitting off of the attachment of the bondsman to his body—because of its transience—and his clinging to himself in the mode of regulating that body. In the movement described by Hegel, as well as in Freud's economy of libidinal attachment, it becomes clear how "an attachment to subjection ... is formative of the reflexive structure of subjection itself" (*PL* 58). The interesting new perspective that comes in with the turning to psychoanalysis as a further interlocutor is the relation between the unconscious and desire in this process of subjection in order to examine the phenomenon of the passionate attachment to subject formation in subjection as an elusive phenomenon.

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[56] See volume one of Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality.*

2   Desire and the Unconscious—A Psychoanalytic Intermezzo

In thinking more about the inevitability of opacity that drives Hegel's narrative, psychoanalysis offers an interesting possibility to reformulate the workings of this opacity. Unlike Hegel's narrative, in psychoanalysis, as Butler reads it—drawing on Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Laplanche—opacity is precisely not figured as something that will eventually be overcome. Rather, opacity, the decentering and rending of the subject that occasions and propels its emergence, is read as constitutive of subject formation. Suspending the Hegelian teleology of the realization of rationality, psychoanalysis is an archeological enterprise; it offers a symptomatic reading, understanding what we see, what we can know, as constitutively traversed by that which we cannot know, which is unconscious. In his study *Freud and Philosophy*[57], Paul Ricoeur has eloquently argued this distinction and for the relation between the teleological endeavor of phenomenology and the archeological enterprise of psychoanalysis. While phenomenology is concerned with reflecting on consciousness as self-consciousness by displacing the notion of immediate self-consciousness by reflection, psychoanalysis inquires into consciousness as self-consciousness by suspending not the notion of immediate self-consciousness, but rather the idea of the control of consciousness. This adjournment of the control of consciousness is at the core of the psychoanalytical inquiry into subject formation, which is to undertake an archeological exploration of the obscure workings of desire. As already shown by the discussion of desire as constitutive for subject formation, it is desire that initiates the turning around of the subject that establishes self-reflexivity. At the same time, the form of this turning around, the tropological movement, is uncovered as not merely being a cognitive turning to oneself, but as a passionate and fiercely fervent turning *on* oneself. This turning on oneself reveals itself as the self-

subjection through which the subject as self-reflexive subject can emerge. In the Butlerian reevaluation of the Hegelian narrative of the lord and bondsman and of the unhappy consciousness, self-subjection proves itself as a bodily self-castigation. This castigation is necessitated by the desire of consciousness for unity and independence in its continuously finding itself in a new situation of dependence and disunity. One aspect of dependence is found in self-consciousness' demand for mutual recognition: only if the otherness of the other remains inassimilable and only if the other grants recognition while the subject recognizes the other as another can I emerge. There is thus in Hegel a fundamental dependence on the other in order for the subject to emerge as self-consciousness. The other and the other's recognition are needed to recognize and understand itself. But the dependence on the other and need for the other remain insofar as recognition and being with others are not annihilated, but are precisely retained through sublation—and these ideas continue to structure the further progression of the development in the *Phenomenology,* while certainly undergoing restagings and reformulations throughout the course of the journey. The other aspect of dependence is found in the vexing dependence of consciousness on the material world, because consciousness cannot be anything but embodied. Being as body means that there is an ineradicable vulnerability and dependence because of bodily transience and fragility as well as the body's material dependence on the material world. The sustainability of my life is not in my hands. I cannot develop enough, cannot simply become independent, as the journey through the *Phenomenology* uncovers. The Hegelian subject desires unity and control, but it is propelled through the narrative, because it is precisely not in control, and more precisely we have to say, I am propelled, because I constantly come to experience and am forced to experience and realize my dependency. What then might it mean to acknowledge and attend to this dependency and vulnerability? What does it mean that my openness to becoming is my vulnerability and that the breach of this vulnerability proliferates my desire to patch this breach and to gain my independence?

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[57] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970). Especially in the third part of this work, Ricoeur argues for a relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis ("Dialectic: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud" 339-551).

In other words, what might the implications be for subject formation and for thinking about these subjects as ethical agents, if desiring—and thus becoming—depends on a constitutive disunity, on being dependent in ways that I cannot ever fully know or control? Engaging with the work of Laplanche, Butler has taken up desire and constitutive opacity as core to subject formation and inseparable from the dependence on and exposedness to the other. For Laplanche, the emergence and formation of the I occur in response to the primary impingement, the demand of the other by which the infant finds itself not only overwhelmed, but—crucially—addressed and compelled to respond. This originary scene becomes only afterwards and retroactively *(nachträglich)* originary and thus figures as an origin that has always already been lost. But while there is an immediate distancing from this primary scene, this very primary scene is never fully overcome, but traverses the I that it mobilizes. The question then becomes what it means that I come to desire that this brokenness and vulnerability be fixed and shielded, but at the same time I can be with others and in this world only through this vulnerability and even the exhaustion, the repetition of my undergoing, my experiencing being hurt, being out of control, being vulnerable.

In Laplanche, there is a focus on desire being bound up with response, and this response to the other is figured as translation of the message and demand from the other. Insofar as desire and the emergence of the I and the unconscious are tied to and orchestrated through a kind of constitutive breach, Laplanche is very similar to Jacques Lacan.[58] But here I would like to hold in play with Laplanche more the aspect that the other arrives through a *message*, which figures the question not only of subject formation and relationality between I and other in very particular terms. In addition, responding to the other and responsibility are traversed by this notion of the message. And yet it is be necessary not to construe the notion of the message all too narrowly. In my reading of Butler reading her authors, there is, in Laplanche, desire as very closely tied to the desire to respond to the other and, more so even, the desire to respond well to an other who has always already been lost. While in Lacan the loss of the other plays a pivotal role as well, I would like to use him in order to hold in play

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[58] Lacan used to be Laplanche's teacher and analyst; later disagreements led to a more distanced relationship; see Jean Laplanche, "Interview: Jean Laplanche talks to Martin Stanton," *Jean Laplanche:*

the emergence of the subject as a split subject, as always already having undergone the phantasmatic loss of a phantasmatic originary unity. The lack of unity appears as a phantasmatic loss of an original unity with the maternal body that is staged as the site of primary pleasure *(jouissance)* and at the same time is barred from the scene of desire that it sets. Also in Lacan, we encounter one figuration of the demand, casting it as demand for love and recognition, which he interestingly differentiates from desire. Desire as desire of the other has an important ambiguity that we will need to attend to insofar as it appears as desiring the other and as the other's desire. So with psychoanalysis desire is still at the heart of subject formation, but it is recast as constitutive loss as well as excess in the encounter with the other. And desire is that which constantly threatens the subject with its own dissolution. The subject emerges not as the self-determining agency of its desire, but rather desire emerges as the inherent opacity and incoherence of consciousness. For Butler, it is crucial to ask what exactly the implications are if subject formation takes place within and through the social. The encounter with the other, the demand, the barring through which the subject emerges then cannot be separated from the norms that structure the social.

With regard to this barring or foreclosure, her argument, however, is not only that this barring takes on concrete forms in the social that are historically contingent; rather, she argues that the account of subject formation through foreclosure itself is already traversed by its own socially and historically contingent conditions of emergence. This means that by this inexorable intertwinement we are called into question in our own attempts of giving an account of the conditions under which and movements through which one becomes a subject. We are called into question in our attempts to theorize, to necessarily step back and only then come to make claims about the conditions of possibility for subjectivation. What does it mean to claim that the foreclosure is constituted only socially? What does it means to claim that all becoming involves a certain constitutive loss? What does it mean when I make such a claim through which I mobilize this I and at the same time distance myself from the scene of subject formation? One part of the task here will be to think and consider the relation between this self-conscious subject as a split subject and the social norms

through which the subject emerges. As the unconscious turns out to play a major role in figuring the relation between desire and the emergence of the self-consciousness, it becomes essential to ask how social regulations work upon and within the subject. Inquiring into the relation between the social norms and subject formation with regard to desire and the emergence of the unconscious, Butler rereads the Freudian accounts of narcissism and melancholia. She traces the implication of the social within the psychic and vice versa as a more complicated relation than the simple internalization of social regulations that leads to the establishment of the ego-ideal. Rather, the psyche is complicit with the social, and hence juxtaposing consciousness and conscience within the field constituted by the interplay between desire and unconscious eventually becomes crucial for the staging of subject formation. This complicity is not only inevitable, but to a certain extent is always unknowable. I can know that I am complicit in my own subjection, but I cannot ever fully know this complicity of mine with my subjection. For the enterprise of critique, this then means that if I depend on these norms, then critiquing and undoing these norms means always to risk risking myself in ways I cannot previously know, account for, or control.

2.1 The Unconscious, Desire, Responses, and Responsibilities

First, however, we must return to desire appearing on the stage at all, and in our doing so, desire will have to be reformulated as the inherent incoherence of the emergent subject. This subject as a self-conscious subject is the conscious subject that is formed in the production and exclusion of the unconscious. That which is other to the consciously reflected, i.e., the unconscious and its emergence, is constitutive in the formation of the conscious subject. The subject emerges through foreclosure, through the closing off against the impingement of the other as split and thus only through the splitting. This means that the subject is always already breached; there is no subject

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Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992) 3-18.

prior to being impinged on. The original unity thus is a fantasy that stages the emergence of the subject retroactively and belatedly. The origin does not exist as such: the story has always already begun and the origin comes to be origin and original only through its evacuation. If this now means that the split is the condition of becoming, if there is no coherent and unified subject prior to being overwhelmed by the other that could be recovered, then we see a peculiar situation emerge here that has direct implications for ethical thought. If life depends not only on being exposed to others, but on an unwilled overwhelming, then we will not be able to simply found ethics on the fact of human finitude, exposedness, and vulnerability and derive a criterion from the violent exhaustions of this exposedness. Ethics and politics then cannot be founded on the project of shielding our vulnerability, which would mean a certain foreclosing on our exposedness to each other. Butler suggests in her *Adorno Lectures* that we might, however, attempt to think about "an ethic from the region of the unwilled," which might come to mean "take[ing] the very unbearability of exposure as the sign, the reminder, of a common vulnerability, a common physicality, a common risk" (*AL* 100). This means that simply because encounters may be overwhelming and painful, this does not mean that we ought not encounter others. It means that instead of rushing to attempt to fix the rules for how we can encounter non-violently, we might come to another ethos in the face of a common vulnerability and shared impossibility to ensure that encounters will not be painful. But certainly the argument here is not to say that we ought to hurt each other or that ethics ought not be animated by the desire to end violence. And this does not adjourn the problematic that the desire to put an end to all pain and suffering seems to become a form of a death-wish. Certainly there are different forms of impingement, different forms of violence, forms that we might come to oppose and those that we might come to condone. The crucial aspect seems to be the question of attending to and becoming vigilant with regard to this unwilled, ineradicable vulnerability, of overwhelming and being overwhelmed. But, at the same time, there might be also a value to not settling on the impossibility of eradicating pain and suffering due to this constitutive exhaustion of vulnerability that seduces to life. There might be no end to this paradox, and it might be important to hold this paradox present in inquiring into ethics and subject formation. In order to do so, I would like to back up a step and suggest that to examine the intertwinement of ethics and subject formation further with regard to the I

coming into itself only by being interrupted and breached by the other, we need to attend more closely to the scenes of individuation Butler offers us through Lacan and Laplanche.

Staged as the scene of individuation, the splitting in Lacan is a splitting from the primordial unity with the maternal body, which is cast as an original libidinal unity. The differentiation works only by a primary separation from that original libidinal unity, which is conceived as *jouissance*, the primary pleasure from which the subject is separated. The loss of this primordial unity figures as the loss of primary pleasure and thus generates the longing for the return to the origin. Desire thus emerges as that which seeks to regain the origin that remains irrecoverably out of reach because desire cannot possibly be satisfied; thus, in desiring the primordial unity—which would mean the reversal of individuation—the subject that is the condition of desire's possibility undoes itself. Libidinal unity with the maternal body as a constitutive threat to the subject is that from which the subject must be barred, because if the subject were to achieve the fusion with the maternal body, the subject would stop to exist as an individual subject. So the desire for independence and strengthening the ego is at the same time the very desire for that which undoes the ego. Desire emerges here as that which cannot be fully satisfied. Butler keeps this unsatisfiability of our desires moving and points us to Lacan's warning: "[D]o not cede upon your desire."[59] We are not to let our desire go, our desire is to be held alive, and, Butler explains, "sometimes satisfaction is the very means by which one cedes upon desire, it can be the means by which one turns against it, arranging for its death" (*AL* 57).[60] Desiring animates life, and desiring necessitates as well as makes possible vigilance due to the ambivalence at the heart of my desires, which I cannot fully know, because desire for Lacan is engendered by that which cannot be attained, by that which is foreclosed.

But if *jouissance* is foreclosed, is that which cannot be desired directly but only by being foreclosed and hindered from entering into the conscious life of me and my desires, then this *jouissance* cannot possibly be the object of conscious desire. The

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[59] Butler gets this exhortation from Lacan's discussion of the ethics of psychoanalysis, where he argues the value of not "giving ground relative to one's desires" (319); Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), especially 319-325.

impossibility of a coherent conscious subject is thus signified by desire, and the agency of this impossibility is the unconscious. Desire is therefore doomed to live an imaginary life by striving to recover what cannot possibly be recovered, namely one's origins. Because this origin or original unity is a libidinal unity with the other, a unity, full and utterly, with the maternal other in Lacan, if this being with the other, this unity with the other, emerges as setting the scene of the irrecoverable origins, then the desire to be, the desire to persist in one's being, cannot be severed from this desire. In other words, perhaps what we see dawn here is a reformulation of the desire to persist in one's being as at its core the desire to be with others. As the desire to live a good life with others might then not presuppose at first the desire to persist in one's own being, as a monad, closed off from the others, my desire to live on ceases when I can no longer live with you. The life of the individual is bound to the desire to recover the origins, the original unity with the other, a unity in which the life of the individual is no longer sustainable. So the persistence in one's being is constitutively traversed by this longing for the other, which is at the same time that which radically undoes the individual to the point where there is no persisting in one's being. The desire to be, then, is not necessarily a simple desire for self-preservation or a championing of self-preservation as primary value. Rather, this being is attached to the other and this attachment is intertwined with a strange kind of death-drive, which can take the form of either the death in becoming fully one with the other or a kind of death in asociality, in monadic individualism. The question that is raised here, then, is how sustainable life can be possible, if there is a constitutive attachment to the other and being overwhelmed as well as drawn to the other that necessitates the constitution of the ego only in a closing off against this other, only in separation from this other without being able to achieve neither complete unity between I and the other nor complete separation, and through this a monadic unity of I and other.

This closing off against the other, against the too much of the other, is at the core of Jean Laplanche's approach to psychoanalysis, which Butler engages in her *Adorno Lectures.* Inquiring into Laplanche enables us to gather some insight into the way the other is prioritized in the account of subject formation. While for Lacan the libidinal

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[60] "Manchmal ist eben die Befriedigung das Mittel, von seinem Begehren abzulassen; sie kann auch das

unity with the other seems to delimit the primary scene, for Laplanche the priority of the other figures in terms of the primary seduction scene, the scene wherein the infant, who does not yet have an ego or unconscious, is overwhelmed by the message that comes from the other. This message is communicated in the form of an address, but one that establishes the enigma of the other in the form of an indecipherable demand that necessitates a response despite the inadequacy of the infant's ability to understand what is being asked of it. Laplanche points out that this encounter as the first "trauma" is actually not traumatic at the time when the infant is impinged on, but is instead a seduction, because trauma is constituted only later, *nachträglich*, through retroactive activation of the overwhelming event in a subsequent encounter that reinvokes this first scene. This belatedness[61] not only applies to the structure of trauma, but to the subject as such that emerges only in response to being overwhelmed by the other.[62]

If—with Butler—we understand being addressed by an other as constitutive and inexorable for the emergence of the I, then subject formation is a question of responding. We will have to inquire into how this responsiveness figures and what it means to respond. While the Lacanian subject, in that regard like the Hegelian one, desires unity and independence in the face of otherness, the Laplanchean subject emerges in the face of being overwhelmed by otherness as well. But while the Laplanchean subject also takes up the I and emerges as ego in defense to the other, this distancing and defending itself seems to be the effect in the back of a different

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Mittel sein, sich gegen das Begehren zu wenden, dessen Tod vorzubereiten" (*AL* 57).

[61] The problem in translating *Nachträglichkeit* comes from the dimension of "deferred action" and "retroactivity," as Laplanche describes these in "Notes on Afterwardsness" (in Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness* [London: Routledge, 1999] 260-265). The notion of deferral indicates that although something is implanted in the subject, it will only be activated later, so the relation here is that the past comes to develop its full impact only in the present. The notion of retroactivity inverts this relation, since it implies that what figures as the past only takes place belatedly, afterwards, through the effect that is instituted, which is to be taken as the precondition of the present. In both cases, deferred action and retroactivity, there seems to be a certain belatedness that is characteristic of that which happens in *Nachträglichkeit*, namely, the past that constitutively bears on the present, while at the same time remaining irrecoverably past. Although Laplanche himself argues that Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* should be translated as "afterwardsness," it seems to me that *belatedness* is well suited to capture both dimensions of deferred action and retroactivity and is better able to hold *Nachträglichkeit's* connotation of coming irrecoverably too late and the connotation of the attempt to reach and belatedly change that which is in the past.

[62] This being overwhelmed by the other then is responsible for the first translation, and from here we can trace how translation is linked to the address that is a demand and an enigma at the same time. By this inquiry, then, the relation among translation, the encounter with the other, and subject formation can be sketched more clearly. And we can trace how the question of subject formation is neither prior or separate from interrogating ethics nor simply a question of "what and who can I, want I, ought I become?" precisely because of the irresolvable opacity at the heart of this inquiry.

desire than in Lacan. In Lacan there is lack, the constitutive split and the bar that prohibits access to *jouissance*. In Laplanche there is too much, particularly too much other, when the other addresses me. The other wants something from me, and the I emerges as *I* need to respond. If the address is received as a demand, then Laplanche offers us the possibility to inquire into the ways in which the demand of the other and the demand and desire to respond *well* to the other then figure ethics as well as an intractable opacity as lying at the heart of subject formation. Responsibility then emerges not only as a crucial issue for the one who is the one overwhelming, but also and especially for the one who is being overwhelmed and who, without being made to respond and thus being made responsible, could not survive and grow. Translation might then afford a way to think about responsibility, and we might ask in what ways responsibility could be and might even have to be recast in terms of translation. But in order to ask such questions, we need to understand more about how subject formation operates through being addressed and responding, which might figure translation as an *adequate* response. We will need to inquire what precisely this address is and what it means when Laplanche stages this address as the primary seduction that necessitates and orchestrates translation as well as the emergence of the I.

Understanding "seduction," as argued by Laplanche, as a fundamental human situation that initiates and orchestrates the emergence of the ego as well as the unconscious does not mean negating the possibility of sexual assault in this encounter, nor does it negate the necessity to negotiate how to discern, how to find criteria, to distinguish non-abusive situations from abusive situations. Although this is and should be a concern, the general seduction theory refrains from speaking to this question; it is instead occupied with something else, as can be understood from Laplanche's introduction of a "third reality" that is different from material reality and from psychological reality. This third reality, which according to Laplanche's argument is the third category Freud is lacking, is the reality of the message or, to be more precise, the reality of the *enigmatic message*. Therefore, Laplanche asserts, "Seduction is not to be placed on the same level as other primal fantasies; it is not a fantasy, but a communication situation. Secondly, this communication is neither bilateral, nor symmetrical" (*Seduction* 10). While Laplanche here speaks of this encounter as a "communication situation," he also emphasizes that we cannot think of this communication as an exchange that implies interaction and even less so as reciprocity

or mutuality.[63] Rather, the asymmetry of the communication figures this scene as a confrontation: the infant is confronted by the other with a message that it cannot understand, but nevertheless to which it must respond.

This asymmetry between infant and adult is thus characterized as an asymmetry in knowledge as well as activity. With regard to the asymmetry in terms of passivity and activity, Laplanche lays out that "[f]rom the beginning, one is active and the other is passive. But very quickly, the little human tries to turn this passivity into activity, that is, to make something of this message from the other. Still, there is this dissymmetry" (*Seduction* 10).[64] Interestingly, a notion of the "beginning" is introduced at this point, and two points are notable with regard to this mentioning. Firstly, Laplanche says "from the beginning" rather than setting up a succession of "first ... and then ...," indicating a continuity of this distribution of activity and passivity throughout time that renders this asymmetry a mark that cannot be limited to the very first encounter with the other, but is somehow carried through. Despite this asymmetry, this position of the "beginning" in passivity is one that is immediately evacuated, because the primary passivity is immediately turned into activity, but also because, as we have already seen, this entire "original" scene is never available at the moment that it is experienced; rather, it is "available" only retroactively and only insofar as it has already been transcended. In her *Adorno Lectures,* Butler points out

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[63] Laplanche makes this point explicitly in his article "Responsabilité et réponse" (in *Entre séduction et inspiration: l'homme* [Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1999] 145-172): "Ce primat nous reporte à une situation qui n'est pas d'autocentration, une situation qui n'est pas même de réciprocité ou comme on dit d'interaction, une situation qui n'est pas de communication réciproque, une situation par essence dissymétrique où je suis passif et désarmé par rapport au message de l'autre" (164).

[64] It is interesting to note here that the originary situation is one of utter passivity, a description that has great resonances with the description offered by Emmanuel Levinas, who even speaks of a "passivity before passivity" to characterize this passivity as not a passivity of letting something happen to one. The originary passivity is a passivity that, for both Laplanche and Levinas, comes before choice can even be possible, and the encounter with the other for both is that which calls the self into being, but this "pre-history" of the subject cannot be remembered and cannot be recovered. Despite the parallels in their accounts, the differences between them are striking and summon a further investigation. While for Laplanche the originary encounter with the other is a seduction, for Levinas the other's persecution constitutes the I: "I have not done anything and I have always been under accusation—persecuted. This ipseity, in the passivity without arche characteristic of identity, is a hostage" (*OTB* 114). The other, in Levinas' account, summons the I as and through the face that "is that possibility of murder, that powerlessness of being that authority that commands me: 'Thou shalt not kill'" (*Alterity and Transcendence,* trans. Michael Smith [New York: Columbia UP, 1999] 104). While in Laplanche the demand of the other remains seductive, overwhelming, and indecipherable all along, the claim of the other in Levinas appears to be quite well defined, although when tracing the consequences of this claim further, it turns out to be less clear than it appears at first. Certainly the connections and differences between Laplanche and Levinas are worth inquiring into, in order to think about

that this retroactivity does not only mean that the I is constitutively unable to give an account of its own origins, but this also means that this primary impingement, this primary being overwhelmed by the other, enables not only my life, but continues to be my vulnerability to you (see *AL* 89-93).

As such, the affective knowledge[65] of this "primary" experience as such an experience already presupposes a translation of the original address, a "making something of this message from the other" that makes this message accessible and manageable in some limited way. This means that speaking of this experience of passivity as original passivity before all activity presupposes an activity of a particular kind, namely, an activity of translation that even more specifically has a reflective and reflexive dimension because it creates an awareness of this experience as this particular experience. This awareness, which is not possible for the infant in the primary seduction scene but only later on, points to the second dimension of the asymmetry in this relation, the asymmetry of knowledge that is intertwined with the asymmetry of passivity and activity.

This differential in knowledge "comes from the fact that the active one has more 'knowledge,'" by which Laplanche means more unconscious fantasies, than does the passive infant. "Knowledge" is in quotation marks here because it is an unknowable kind of knowledge that renders the adult's actions overwhelming for the infant. The unknowability of this knowledge is due to the fact that it springs from the adult's "having an unconscious," which is a strange kind of having because the unconscious' presence cannot be mastered by the adult; rather, his or her actions are infused with unconscious fantasies. Thus, the message that is communicated does not only come to the child by means of verbal communication, but also by a nonverbal message that cannot be controlled by the one who is transmitting it. Laplanche terms this as an

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the relation among ontology, epistemology, and ethics in general, and about the notion of responsibility in specific.

[65] The problem here in using the term "knowledge" is that it might seem to imply a reduction to the cognitive aspect of experiential knowledge, which may not be available, even in the first place, cognitively. The precipitates of experience, however, seem to affect the cognitive dimension, even if that occurs only by delimiting the possibility of that which can be thought. Introducing the distinction between conscious and unconscious here could help us to understand how the unconscious is established as unknowable, but unknowable precisely due to its emergence by repression. Hence, the unconscious continues to delimit and affect the domain of the knowable. If the ego, furthermore, has to be understood, as Freud argued, as "first and foremost a bodily ego," an inquiry into the visceral dimension of experiential "knowledge" could be undertaken from here.

enigma rather than a riddle, since the implication of the term "riddle" is that the one posing the riddle has the solution to it at his or her disposal.[66] Consequently, the one in the active position cannot fully control what she or he is communicating. This is significant for thinking about responsibility, because here that which I cannot control is that which overwhelms the other, is too much for the other, thus framing an ethical dilemma of how to relate to the other if my attempt to relate and to communicate is necessarily and unavoidably already constituting some kind of impingement. Yet it is precisely my inability to fully know that binds me, because I cannot know to *which extent* and *what precisely* will be overwhelming, but I can know very well *that* my attempt to communicate entails a confrontation. In order to labor on this dilemma and its implications further, it is important to realize that this inability to have full control over the effect, content, and meaning of my actions is dependent on my own relation to the enigma of the other, which is necessarily figured in terms of translation of my own situation of having been addressed.

With regard to the connection between enigma and translation, Laplanche explicitly states the relation between them in his lecture "Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation,"[67] where he says of the messages the infant receives from the adult world that they are "messages perceived as enigmatic, that is as a 'to be translated'" (175). The enigma is fundamentally structured as a message from the other that comes as a demand from the other, so it is possible to establish a link between the address by the other, the demand of the other that is constitutive of this address, and the notion of translation and the problem of the emergence of the I in response to the enigmatic address. This means that it is the enigmatic character itself that demands translation. The example that Laplanche gives to explicate the enigmatic nature of this message coming from the other is the example of the child encountering the mother's breast, which "is a major erogenous zone in a woman, which cannot fail to perform that

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[66] Laplanche offers a concise explanation of the notion of enigma and its key characteristics in his essay "Time and the Other" in his *Essays on Otherness*: "An enigma, like a riddle, is proposed to the subject by another subject. But the solution of a riddle in theory is completely in the conscious possession of the one who poses it, and thus it is entirely resolved by the answer. An enigma, on the contrary, can only be proposed by someone who does not master the answer, because his message is a compromise-formation in which his unconscious takes part" (254-5 n. 46).

[67] Jean Laplanche, "Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation: A Lecture Given at the University of Kent, 30 April 1990," *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives*, 161-177.

function in relation to the child. What does this breast which feeds and excites me want of me? What incites me to be excited? What does it want to say to me that it doesn't know itself?" (*Seduction* 189).[68] Clearly this example is an inference, a fantasmatic inference, because that which one thought as an infant encountering the breast by which one was fed cannot be remembered. But perhaps this failure to remember owes itself to the fact that the message or enigma of the other is not merely a statement that could not be fully understood, but that in this staging of this scene, there is an address that is understood as an address to *me* through which the other *demands* something from me. The emergence of the I through the impingement of the other on the infant is a strange movement; Laplanche characterizes it as a defense against the breaking in of the other. This shows that there is anxiety at work in the Laplanchean scene of primary seduction: the demand of the other is indecipherable, but not so indecipherable that I would not know myself addressed by the other. The *demand* of the other is both perceived and perceived as singling me out as the one— but the one *what*? How do we get to the me as the one who has to take up the I and respond? Furthermore, where did the other go? The other is never fully present; the other is present only *in* and *as* the unknowable address, and not merely an address, but an address that communicates or confronts me with a *demand*, a demand and yet an *enigmatic* demand.

Because it is enigmatic, the demand is at its heart unknowable, and, as Laplanche lays out, it is this unknowability that conditions the untranslatability of the enigma of the other and obligates me to translate. What does it mean to then respond to an address and, more specifically, to a demand that is addressed to one by translating it? If I say that I have to respond to the demand that is addressed to me and if I then go on to speak about my response, this presupposes that I have somehow acquired some understanding of what this demand means, what it entails, and what the other requires of me. While for Laplanche the next issue to consider here is the question of the opacity of desires and attachments emerging in response to the enigmatic address, Butler might perhaps foreground that we are here encountering the problematic of acknowledgement and responsibility that is inseparably bound up with the social and

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[68] Jean Laplanche, "The Drive and Its Object-Source: Its Fate in the Transference," *Jean Laplanche:*

historical conditions of the address. Because the address and the response are not merely the business of a dyad, the question of how to respond and how to offer acknowledgement through the response is not merely a problematic of your opacity to yourself and my opacity to myself, but immediately points us beyond ourselves to the limits of the grammar and its history and sociality that we *nolens volens* draw on in addressing and responding and that we did not make (*AL* 36).

This means that while we cannot ever fully know ourselves or others and hence cannot ever know how precisely to respond well, this irresolvable opacity and dispossession are not a sphere prior to or an exempt from the social. The opacity and inability to control are precisely structured and animated by the language, the social norms and rules traversing us. And in responding, in assuming the I, Butler explains, "[t]he 'I' is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence" (*AL* 20). Thus, how to respond becomes a double problematic, because neither does the other addresses him- or herself to me in a fully lucid way nor could I ever fully rationally determine the standards for satisfaction of this demand. Returning to Laplanche and the breast, we can now refigure this problematic with regard to translation and responding and trace the emergence of the desiring subject through being overwhelmed and seduced. Initially, the infant is overwhelmed by the other ("what does the breast want from me?"), and moreover the infant itself is turned on itself, as the other calls the infant before itself and asks about the infant's own investment in the other: "What is this breast that it excites me?" Because the infant does not understand the message, it does not in fact know "what does the breast *want* from me?" This means that there is in the infant, as well as in the individual later in life in subsequent encounters with the other, not only the desire to make sense, to understand in the sense of cognitive understanding, but in addition there seems to be a desire to respond to the other and to respond well to the other, or at least there is the acknowledgment of the necessity to *respond*. This dimension of responding by translating means to step away from understanding translation as a cognitive and "ideational" enterprise and instead rereading translation as "the adoption of a comprehensive position—at one and the same time affective, imaginative, intellectual

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Seduction, Translation, Drives, 179-195.

and active—relative to the adult message" (*Essays on Otherness* 161).[69] Translation is that movement that performs the transition from utter passivity, the passivity of being overwhelmed by the other, into an activity that is possible only relative to the other's breaking in. Furthermore, in translation, affect, imagination, and intellect are intertwined in a movement of auto-positioning in response to the radical decentering by the other.

This movement of closing off in translation is owed to the fact that the infant does not have the sufficient means to translate at the same time as the enigma of the other is the enigma of the other's other, which is that which cannot ever be fully known. Thus, in the process of translation, that which cannot be translated is repressed and forms the unconscious where the untranslatable continues to live on. The unconscious hence is, for Laplanche, "the result of repression bearing on fragments of communications which it, by doing so, makes foreign to the context which is their origin" (*Essays on Otherness* 174). This means that through the process of translation, the initial message that came from the other person is displaced, the origin evacuated and relocated inside the subject, where that which could not be translated is retained in the unconscious. The unconscious, however, does not have an indolent presence; rather, the remainders continue to impact the conscious I and constantly demand translation and retranslation because of the instability and preliminarity of the present translation.

Laplanche speaks about this reworking of the past through retranslation as connected to the *Nachträglichkeit* of the human individual, which is constitutive of subject formation insofar as the subject emerges only belatedly and retroactively in response to the primary impingement by the other. This nexus between the impingement and the belatedness is linked to Laplanche's explication of trauma, which strictly speaking does not occur in the first situation that is called "traumatic." Rather, for it to be effective, there must first be something that comes from outside, is implanted, and "must be internalized" (Caruth ¶7), and it is then in a second situation relived. Laplanche describes this sequence in an interview with Cathy Caruth: "First, there is the implantation of something coming from outside. And this experience, or the memory of it, must be reinvested in a second moment, and then it becomes

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[69] Jean Laplanche, "Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics: A Restatement of the

traumatic" (¶7). Only in the second instance, through the revivification, is the trauma constituted. With regard to the question of subject formation and the address of the other, this would mean only through the repetition of the address is the primary "trauma" constituted fully as trauma. The constitutive belatedness of the I emerges only in response to being overwhelmed by the other and thus through trauma grants a primacy to infancy, to being in the position of helplessness and passivity that is nevertheless not merely a temporal primacy that, once past, is overcome and left behind without bearing on the present. Rather, Laplanche argues, since this primacy of the other's overwhelming presence is constitutive for the emergence of the subject, in being constitutive it presents an irrecuperable breach in the subject that cannot be recovered, but merely disavowed.[70] Translation is in a certain way a closure, a distancing of oneself from the other, but by means of moving toward the other, and thus translation constitutes an attachment to the other. The attachment to the other and the other's demand rends the heart of the subject and of theorizing subject formation. The other's desire disorients not only because of the decentering of the subject, but also because the other is not a unity but herself is traversed by otherness.

Lacan further elaborates this ambiguity of the other and otherness in desire with regard to the foreclosed originary pleasure in order to understand how the subject emerges in self-reflexivity. The other is not only the unconscious, but also the other as an other, originally the mother. In Lacan the connection between the other as the unconscious and the other as an other lies in the libidinal unity with this mother that marks the site of primary loss that generates desire. This investment in unity with the other causes the unconscious to emerge as signifier precisely because this primary pleasure is foreclosed; desire emerges as "desire of the other." For Butler the ambiguity that opens up here is crucial in attempting to understand subject formation and the ambiguity and opacity through which I am engendered, through which I am in my relation with the other, which traverses me and without which I cannot be. My desire is as "desire of the other"—but which other? The unconscious? The

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Problem," *Essays on Otherness*, 138-165.

[70] Laplanche makes this point explicitly in his article "Responsabilité et réponse" (164), where he speaks of the impossibility to fully overcome the primacy of infancy, rendering it unachievable to completely leave the primary helplessness behind just as well as to comprehensively recollect and recover this situation in analysis.

unconscious that I cannot even call mine, because one cannot "have" an unconscious—it is that which evades my mastery, my control, my possession? If my desires are of the unconscious, then I am not simply my desires, then we cannot speak of my desires being the most authentic expression of myself, but my desires are the very moment of my dispossession, my undergoing a displacement that I cannot fully recover reflexively and reflectively. But through desire I am turned on myself; my self-reflexivity is engendered only through my desires, hence through my self-dispossession. Self-reflexivity breaks open through its impossibility, through my being traversed by the other, by that which remains irrecoverably unknowable. But what are "my desires"? Desire as "desire of the other"—I emerging as desiring to be desired *by* the other, fulfilling the other's desires, responding well to the other—or I emerging as desiring to desire *as* the other? As subject to and subject of desire, I emerge as desiring to be the object of the other's desire as well as desiring to identify with the other and to assume the other's position. As desiring *as* the other, desire aims towards unity with the other, whereas as desiring to be the object of the other's desire, desire is bound up with the demand for the unconditional love and recognition of the other. With Laplanche, reception of a demand incites the *desire* to respond, and even to respond well. And through the passionate attachment, the desire animating the I in the response figures not simply as something delivered out of a disinterested sense of duty. The emergence of the I thus is inseparable from a certain mode of responsibility and drama of the attachment to the name of the other. The I emerges not in a monologic "how am I to respond well to the other?" but precisely because a response has to be another address in order to be a proper response, the question becomes "how to respond well to you?" and "who are you? You by whom I am beheld?" The name of the other—you—emerges as the "name of my agony" (see *AL* 90), traversing and animating the conflicted I.

The relation between the other and the subject especially in its connotation of the unconscious and the subject cannot be thought of as an internal difference that can be sublated, because this would imply a unity of unconscious and subject at the core. The Lacanian splitting as that through which the subject emerges at all is "the difference between unity (the founding pretense of the subject) and disunity (the irrecoverability of the unconscious)" (*SD* 187). The unconscious therefore cannot be understood as a prereflective consciousness that is merely not yet realized in mediation by the

reflexivity of consciousness. Rather, the unconscious is understood by Lacan as a signifier or chain of signifiers whose relation to consciousness is contingent; the subject then becomes the product of this signifier as well as the bar instituted against the recovery of the unconscious. The unconscious as a signifier or chain of signifiers gestures towards the linguistic dimension of the Lacanian theory, which casts subject formation as an entry into the symbolic. The symbolic is the linguistic realm that is based on the principle of differentiation and thus structured by absences and presences. This differentiation is required by the paternal law, which decrees the splitting of the child from maternal identification. The signifier that governs the symbolic hence is the phallus, and a further effect of the paternal law is the fear of the phallus, because the phallus signifies the incest prohibition that first caused foreclosure.[71]

The inauguration of self-awareness occurs always only on the condition of and through foreclosure, which is the entry into the symbolic by the prohibition through which the subject enters into language. The I can emerge only in relation to a you, a he, or a she with whom the subject does not identify. Unlike Butler, who is interested in the structures of address and interpellation, Lacan does not foreground the question of being addressed as constitutive for individuation. In her works prior to her *Adorno Lectures,* Butler focuses on the demand and injunction of norms through which the subject emerges by being addressed; more recently, she has engaged more with the relation between that dimension of the address and the dimension of this address as implying an other person as a "you." In contrast, in Lacan I do not explicitly need to be addressed by you, but I am engendered through you or him or her, because I come to take up this I as different from you and them. The I is the position in the symbolic or the position through which I enter into the symbolic. In this entry, the imaginary and the symbolic are intertwined precisely through this differentiation and separation from the other that proffers the imaginary of my unity. For the constitution of desire, this then means that—as Butler puts it—"[d]esire thus emerges in language, of language, precisely to the extent that the subject is foreclosed from a more original

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[71] An incisive critique and productive rereading of the phallus as chief signifier can be found in Butler's "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," *BTM* 57-91.

pleasure, one that can be posited as a phantasmatic beginning only retroactively by a subject in language" ("Desire" 380).[72]

In distinction to Hegel, Lacan understands the emergence of desire in language not as the rhetorical enactment of desire by uttering it, as this would presuppose the unity in the utterance of the negation, but, as Butler explains, "[d]esire ... appears as a gap, a discrepancy, an absent signifier, and thus only appears as that which cannot appear" (*SD* 193). Hence, desire is argued as a displacement that never works completely because desire always appears as something else; its appearance is a therefore a constant deception. It is thus impossible to reduce desire to its appearance, and it emerges in language only as opacity. In consequence, Lacan criticizes Hegel for presupposing way too much knowledge of the subject about itself and so reducing desire to its conscious component: "For in Hegel it is desire (*Begierde*) that is given the responsibility for that minimum connection with ancient knowledge (*connaissance*) that the subject must retain if truth is to be imminent in the realization of knowledge (*savoir*)" (*Écrits* 301).[73] Instead, the junction between truth and knowledge needs to be opened as "desire becomes bound up with the desire of the Other[;] ... in this loop lies the desire to know" (*Écrits* 301). Butler points out that in this criticism, Lacan misses "the comedy of errors" (*SD* 196) that constitutes the journey of the Hegelian subject. The Hegelian subject, as it proceeds from stage to stage, still constantly thinks that—with each new stage it has reached—it has already gained what it was striving for, namely, unity and integrity. Yet constantly the erratic assumption is exposed and the subject's journey continues anew. Therefore, the Hegelian subject is not quite as self-transparent as Lacan characterizes it. Even so, the Hegelian subject emerges as a potentially self-transparent subject whose self-transparency is implied from the very beginning; it simply needs to actualize itself by finally arriving at the end of its journey. The Lacanian subject, however, never will arrive at self-transparency because the unconscious as the other is constitutive for it and a full recovery of the unconscious, and so full self-knowledge would mean the elimination of the subject. Consequently, the inability to know oneself emerges as

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[72] Judith Butler, "Desire," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 369-386.

[73] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

traversing and at the same time propelling subject formation. The unknowability is inseparable from a relation to the other and desire. But the question of responsibility remains with regard to how a relation with an other can be possible that neither assimilates the other as "just like me," nor posits and keeps the other at a safe distance as so very other and unknowable that the other's otherness does not call me into question. And in asking about the intertwinement of subject formation and ethics, the question is also how precisely the social norms and ideals orchestrate this process, how precisely they shape, produce, and orchestrate our desires and attachments.

2.2 Intractable Subjects, Disavowed Desires—Never Loved, Never Lost

Perhaps knowledge is indeed a project for desire, but this is not a kind of knowledge in the sense of gathering information, but rather knowledge in the sense of certainty about the other's love. In Lacan, demand figures as the demand for the other's love. Desire, for him, is the differential between need, which is the biological drive, and demand, which is the expressed requirement for love and unconditioned recognition: "[D]esire is neither appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference which arises from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)" (*Écrits* 287). By means of the demand for recognition, the intersubjective aspect of subject formation is underlined, which evidences that the unconscious cannot be understood as a presocial locality that is established prior to the subject's entry into the social. Consequently, the foreclosure of the fusion with the maternal body is not merely a logical necessity, but foreclosure is also bound up with the function of the incest prohibition. This means that the desire that sets the scene for the multiplicity of desires to follow is established through the initial prohibition that bars the subject from *jouissance*, and so this "originary" desire depends on the very prohibition it at the same time desires to transgress. The foreclosed desire for *jouissance* is formed in the process of individuation, which produces not only the subject but also the unconscious as the desired other. In being bound up with demand, in demand, desire thus seeks to *know* about the other's unconditional love. As Butler elucidates, the result of demand can even be an effort to

renounce all needs, since they appear as particular, contingent, and vain and thus as insignificant and useless regarding unconditional recognition. Desire as the differential between demand and need "emerges as a sacrificial mediator ... [that] enacts the paradox of need and demand" (*SD* 197), as the focus on knowing about the other's love renders need unimportant and even counterproductive in its vanity and its animalistic dimension. Here the Hegelian motif of the purification of the body reemerges, insofar as self-consciousness realizes its own bodily transience in the animalistic functions of its own body of which it sought to redeem itself in order to achieve independence in the "purity of the heart."

This desire to renounce the body because of its vanity and insignificance regarding the demand for the other's love is not directly an investment in the *insignificance* of the body. But the body is evaluated as extremely significant regarding the other's desire, yet as the desire to renounce the body emerges here, it does so as an investment in the body's imperfection and unruliness as repulsive to the other. Furthermore, since certainty of the other's desire cannot be achieved and since in desiring the other's love the other is desired, the hatred that originates from the fear and frustration of the inextinguishable uncertainty cannot be directed against the other, but instead must be redirected against the unruly and impure body. The purpose of self-flagellation is to renounce and purify the body in the name of the demand for love. However, precisely at this point, desire is exposed as a paradoxical activity, as "enacting the paradox between demand and need," since the renunciation of need is unveiled as obsession with the body, the agency of need. Desire, however, is not merely unmasked as a paradoxical activity with regard to the aspect of desire for being the object of the other's desire. This paradoxicality is embedded in the paradoxicality of desire as desire for unity with the other, because at the same time as the other is desired, its foreclosure is the condition of the possibility of the subject. Desire in Lacan thus is that which subverts the subject and the notion of intentionality by decentering the subject in the staging of the impossibility of the recovery of the constitutive lack of the subject.

But this lack is at the same time bringing forth and mobilizing desire as excessive and productive surplus. Yet, in emerging as this productive and excessive agency, desire is nevertheless dependent on that which it is to exceed, namely, the scene of its emergence and constitution in the interplay with regulation and prohibition as well as

in the dialectic of renunciation and proliferation. Desire becomes a productive and excessive surplus precisely in exceeding the conditions of its emergence. These conditions, however, have to be disavowed in this operation and thus are rendered unconscious. It becomes important to inquire into the conditions, the norms, and the regulations that govern the formation of the subject and desire, because it matters to examine which subjects and desires are foreclosed as impossible since the unconscious is "a certain mode in which the unspeakably social endures" (*CHU* 153).[74] Social and historical conditions are contingent and changeable, and thus it matters to question the mechanisms of subjection to the regulations and norms that occasion subject formation.

These norms and regulations orchestrate the entrance of the subject into the symbolic in an act of differentiating the I as a specific "I" from and over and against the specific "you," "he," and "she." The symbolic order that is structured by the phallus as chief signifier exists in interplay with the real and the imaginary. The real is characterized as that in which there is no absence; it is thus undifferentiated and therefore "the impossible" (see *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 165).[75] The interrelation of the real and the symbolic could be understood as a kind of dialectic, insofar as the symbolic introduces a "cut into the real" because "[i]t is the world of words that creates the world of things—the things originally confused in the *hic et nunc* of all in the process of coming-into-being" (*Écrits* 65). At the same time, the real remains impossible to be fully assimilated by and integrated into the symbolic and so totalized by and reduced to it. Thus, the real is said to have a traumatic character, because it is the limit as internal limit that is constitutive for the symbolic.[76] The imaginary is interconnected with both the real and the symbolic insofar as it is the medium of the production and proliferation of the illusion of wholeness, autonomy, similarity, and identity while nevertheless being structured by the symbolic order. In this way, the imaginary plays a major role in subject formation due to the emergence of the ego in the mirror stage; this formative process takes place through the subject's

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[74] Judith Butler, "Competing Universalities," *CHU* 136-181.

[75] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).

[76] For Butler's criticism of the Lacanian real, especially through engaging with Slavoj Žižek's rendition of it, see *BTM* (187-222) and especially the essays in *CHU*; there Žižek's replys can also be found.

identification with the specular image that is identified as oneself, while remaining other than oneself—namely, the specular *image of* oneself. At the same time, this specular image is an imaginary idealization of the unity of the bodily ego and so leads to the establishment of the ego-ideal within the subject as well.

This differentiation is bound up with the imaginary insofar as the entrance into the symbolic is compelled by the paternal law that prohibits the original unity with the maternal body, and so the separation is not merely a cognitive act of the initiation of self-awareness, but it is bodily at its core. As Freud famously argued, "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" (*The Ego and the Id* 16). In the mirror stage, the ego emerges through the identification of the emergent subject with its specular image. In this identification with the specular image, the conjunction between object cathexis (passionate investment) and narcissism becomes obvious, since in identification the image is cathected as other, but at the same time identification means the obliteration of the difference between the object and the subject. Thus, identification is a tropological movement of narcissistic libido in which the ego emerges in turning back on itself. The obliteration of the difference between the specular image and the ego does not completely succeed, however. Even so, the difference is reinstituted within the subject as the ego-ideal because the ego identifies with the image that always is an image of itself and hence an idealized illusion of itself. The desire for identification, the desire for fully assuming the position of the I by the failure of utter identification due to the splitting of the ego into ego and ego-ideal, is not eliminated but merely reproduced.

The ego-ideal consequently turns out not to be the independently powerful agency of internalized social regulations and idealizations that controls and curbs the ego. It must also be considered that the ego is passionately invested in subjecting itself to the ego-ideal and readily acting upon its demands so that total identification will finally be reached and the unity within the subject recovered. The power of the ego-ideal thus must be interpreted in relation to the desire for the obliteration of the other within the subject that disturbs its coherence. Owing to the investment in coherence, precisely these mechanisms and investments have to be repressed, which means that they are reinstituted in the unconscious. The unconscious as the other within the subject is the *Fluchtpunkt* (vanishing point) or, in other terms, the trauma that exposes the passivity of the active and conscious subject as the condition of its subsistence. As

subject of its desires, the subject turns out to be subject to its desires. But how then can I resist? How is resistance possible if there is no position outside these entanglements from which I could disentangle the scene of my becoming, the norms and ideals to which I am passionately attached? How can I resist, if there is no knowing—and much less controlling—the conditions of my becoming? Butler's offer to these issues is to radically call into question these questions and their presupposition, namely, calling into question the notion that without full knowledge and control there can be no resistance. She carefully and insistently lays out how the norms through which I emerge do not fully determine me, how the scenes of subjectivation are exceeded by the subject. While these primary scenes are instituted retroactively in *Nachträglichkeit*, this does not simply mean that their efficacy is "merely fictional," that the I simply made up its story. It merely means that I can never give an account of the conditions of my becoming with full authority. The desires I come to call "my" desires are traversed and constituted through social norms: I did not make the coordinates of my desires, I did not even choose them, I cannot ever give a full account, a coherent explanation, of why I came to desire this way. But what does it mean to discover that my desires are contingent upon social norms and ideals? What does it mean that while I might be able to realize *that* they are socially and historically contingent and not an upsurge of authenticity, I am still incapable of understanding *how* precisely my relations with others and with norms orchestrate my history, my becoming? I exceed the scene of my becoming, I come to tell a story—stories—about it, but I am not coextensive with either the scene of my becoming or with the story of my becoming. The "I," in fact, as Butler emphasizes, is radically incommensurable with the stories and accounts we come to offer about it, precisely because the I is the moment in language that performs as the position I take up to speak and through which I can become recognizable precisely because the I fails to be fully mine. Butler works out in her *Adorno Lectures* how the I—that cannot be without not having been first touched through an address by an other person—is the nonnarrativizable moment that continuously and constitutively disrupts and dispossesses me. I am traversed and dispossessed by that which gives me life; the address works not outside our social and historical particularities: it cannot but work through them, draw on them. Gestures, words, you, and I are imbued with social meaning that is not ours, that we inherited, that we pass on, that we cannot ever fully

know. But what then does this mean for the possibility of resistance, if I am not only traversed and enabled by the social norms that I come to oppose, but that I cannot quite not desire? In order to think about this question, we need to inquire how norms orchestrate subject formation and how this attachment is produced in what ways.

Norms work through delimiting, through setting boundaries, stipulating certain behaviors, producing and compelling ideals, and through those they operate in a normalizing way. But psychoanalysis helps us to understand how norms are not external to preexisting subjects and are then encountered by those subjects and possibly internalized. Rather, there is an attachment to these norms through which the differentiation between I and the others and the world, the differentiation between internal and external, is formed. This formation takes place through identification and regulation as relations to norms and normalization. The ego-ideal controlling the desires of the ego, demanding the repression of certain desires, then becomes the agency of producing and preserving precisely the desires it seeks to regulate. The economy of desire and its repression, or libido and its repression, especially in Freudian psychoanalysis, is always seen as a libidinally invested effort itself and therefore can be understood in analogy to Hegel's concept of determinate negation as that which does not eliminate that which is negated but preserves it in sublation. That said, Hegelian sublation is not Freudian proliferation, as the Freudian psychoanalytic narrative is not teleologically animated; the reformulations and proliferations of desires, attachments, and investments do not lead to a more complete version of the subject. The effort to annihilate the libido through repression is thus exposed as necessarily failing, because "the libido is not absolutely negated through repression, but rather becomes the instrument of its own subjection" (*PL* 55).

Here a crucial feature of the Butlerian understanding of the productivity of subjection is exposed, because the relation between desire and repression, as well as the relation between the body and its abnegation—relations that are to be extended to the formative relation between the subject and its subjection—show how the norms that are repressing and subjecting are not external to the libidinal economy. The opposite is the case: repression is part of the dynamic that sustains the libidinal economy, since it functions within the processes of desire, or "passionate attachment," to repress a certain libidinal investment; libido or desire thus not only reemerges in the form of the repressed, but it is also present in the form of stock taken in the repressing

activity. If we now want to think about what it means to do a critique, then we are coming to see here that critique cannot mean to impart knowledge and give reasons about what is repressive, as if this means that we could then simply get rid of these conditions. But critique comes to be bound to an archeology of passionate attachments, and such an archeology will be the unbecoming practice of risking and undoing oneself. Such an archeology will constantly run into its own limits because these attachments are precisely not transparent and readily avowable.

The economy that is exposed here is that desire is displaced by its prohibition. The desire does not simply disappear—just as the body does not simply become immortal and the self not simply self-sufficient by abnegating its dependence on the body—but the displacement of the desire means that now the act of repressing of it is libidinally invested. Therefore, repression now becomes the site of satisfaction, and the very act of repressing becomes an experience of satisfaction, and "[b]ecause this displaced satisfaction is experienced through the application of the law, that application is reinvigorated and intensified with the emergence of every prohibited desire" (*PL* 56). This argument hinges on the presence of a displacement; if there is a *re*placement instead, then the account for the economy of repression is not necessary, because one desire is simply replaced by another one.

At this point, the question of the trace or the remainder comes in and requires that we in turn pose the question of what happens to the former desire and the cathected object in an account that favors the idea of replacement. Desire and object are then either forgotten or still present in the form of the memory of them; even so, the replacement theory would argue, the memories are stripped of the libidinal cathexis. Remembered desire that once was an active desire is present, but no longer as an active desire, only *remembered as* active. This kind of memory could be understood as "worked through" in the sense that Freud presents it in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia,"[77] in which he argues that what happens in the healthy process of mourning is the retraction of cathexis from the loved object that has been lost and the reinvestment into a new object. In melancholia, the desire is displaced because one cannot avow the loss, and Butler's argument is that all subject formation includes a

moment that works like the Freudian account of melancholia as due to the preemptive loss that institutes the subject, which has to be barred from reflection and which generates desire as metonymic agency. The question returning here is what it means to theorize our becoming not only as a life that remains irremediably vulnerable, but as a life that is only through this vulnerability, having already been injured. What precisely is this injury, what precisely is this pain, and to what loss is it bound? While Lacan points us towards *jouissance* and original unity, Laplanche points us to the other and the other's demand addressed to me that overwhelms and seduces me to respond as I. But the response irrecoverably comes too late, and ironically I cannot be but through this belatedness—in a certain sense, it is only through this temporal delay that my response can be a *response*. And only through the temporal delay can there be spatial differentiation and individuation; only because I am not you and my response is not coinciding with you can I respond to you. But who are you? Is this you the one who addressed me? In Laplanche, what I have lost is the other and the original message coming from the other. But what precisely is it in loss and melancholia that what has been lost and cannot be mourned? Freud explains that in melancholia the loss of an object is signified as the unconscious and unspeakable and cannot be mourned, because the cathexis had to be disavowed in the first place.

If desire for an object is repudiated and repressed, one cannot possibly grieve the loss of that object, because how can one mourn what one has never loved? The denial of the attachment thus demands disinterest in the "death" of the object. This object, as Freud points out, can be a loved person, but it can also be "some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (*Mourning and Melancholia* 243). If the loss is unspeakable, mourning as a normal process of working through the loss, of admitting the loss and the grief and so decathecting the object, cannot take place. Since the loss has actually occurred, though, the passionate attachment to the object that now is lost cannot continue to live on as a repressed attachment, as it could before. Therefore, some displacement necessarily has to take place, and since identification is a means of psychic preservation of the object, in melancholia that attachment is transferred onto the

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[77] Sigmund Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie," *GW* 10:427-446; "Mourning and Melancholia," *SE*

subject through identifying with the lost object. In this move of identifying with the lost object, however, the ego is compelled to disavow this identificatory move, because the object is lost after all and the loss is to be acknowledged. Melancholy can thus be understood in terms of a tropological movement, as Butler argues, since "the ego is said to 'turn back upon itself' once love fails to find its object and instead takes itself as not only an object of love, but of aggression and hate as well" (*PL* 168). This turn facilitates the perception of the ego as object and thus includes a redoubling of the ego inside the psyche as perceptual object. The compulsion to substitute for the lost objects allows the ego to emerge in this process as a sedimentation of the traces of the lost objects. Butler concludes that we can understand the ego as "the resolution of a tropological function into the ontological effect of the self" (*PL* 169). The ambivalence of the object cathexis results from the fact that the love that exists in the first place is thwarted by the loss. To cope with this loss, the investment undergoes disavowal by affirming hate against the lost loved one. The special situation found in melancholia is that this negative aspect surfaces as the object has been installed inside the ego. The explanation for this particular course of action is that as soon as the ego has identified with the features and qualities of the lost object, the object cathexis is transformed in narcissism. Because the cathexis then is transferred from the object to the ego and because the ego has failed as a substitute because it always only is a substitution, the ambivalence of the cathexis can come to full effect. This ambivalence renders the narcissism negative narcissism, love turns to hate, since the ego-ideal emerges at the same time as the agency that will continue the hatred against the object in aggressiveness against the ego.

The formative process that takes place in the figure of melancholia can thus be summarized as follows. An external object or ideal is lost, and because the decathexis of this object or ideal is refused, the object or ideal is withdrawn into the ego. The ego thus is substituted for the lost object or ideal, inducing an inner reduplication of the ego that leads to the splitting of the ego, producing the critical agency that takes the ego as its object and measures, evaluates, and judges it. But this evaluative, measuring reflexivity is always undermined insofar as it emerges through the operation of a loss

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14:237-260.

that has to remain disavowed and that constitutes desire as an operation of the unconscious that incessantly ruptures the coherence of the conscious subject. The transference of passionate attachment and the turning of the ego on itself as it occurs in melancholia also elucidate the connection between the psychic and the social and the connection among desire, the unconscious, and conscience as subject-formative agency.

The relationship between the psychic and the social can be examined in the relation with the lost other that is sustained by the melancholic saying to her- or himself what she or he would have addressed to the departed. Accusing and denouncing the other, for leaving if for nothing else, now takes place as self-beratement in a form of negative narcissism: "I revile myself and rehabilitate the other in the form of my own internal ambivalence" (*PL* 182-3). Neither relations to others nor to oneself can hence be fully free from ambivalences. So the starting point for thinking about being with others in the world cannot be some untainted desire of harmonious being and living together with others that simply needs to be offered the right social conditions under which it can flourish. Instead, desires are always compromised, and it is crucial to attend to and become vigilant—precisely not uncritical—towards the ambivalences that emerge prolifically at the heart of our relations.

The consequence of the ungrievablility of the loss is a "heightening of conscience," which shows that the self-beratement is not an internalized reenactment of earlier reprimands from others, other persons and social authorities of judgment. Rather, the social regulations determine the losses that can be grieved and those that are sanctioned as ungrievable, because the attachments that precede the loss are attachments that have to be disavowed. Butler labors on the concrete situation of foreclosed or restricted grievability with regard to the loss of a same-sex partner, which under certain conditions has to remain ungrieved as the loss of the *partner* and *lover*. The anger that is a part of homosexual melancholia, "what the newspapers generalize as 'depression'" (*PL* 148), as "pervasive cultural risk," thus becomes the incentive for political action.

Butler's example is the difficulty experienced in the 1980s in mourning those who died from AIDS and the politicization that went along with that (e.g., the AIDS Memorial Quilt, which is a project of the NAMES Project Foundation). Politicization,

however, does not automatically mean a resolution of the ungrieved grief, because "[i]nsofar as the grief remains unspeakable, the rage over the loss can redouble by virtue of remaining unavowed" (*PL* 148). It is, then, not only the lost object of homosexual attachment that cannot be grieved, but also that in the absence of forms of mourning, this loss cannot be grieved. And, furthermore, if that anger or rage is culturally and socially expected and thus proscribed, survival becomes impossible. The proscription of that rage happens exactly in the explaining away of the discontents and activism of queers as "their narcissistic problems" or "their necessary stage they must go through to find their identity." In this explaining away the homosexual attachment, heterosexuality is sustained as "never" lost and "never" grieved, because the rage of "them," "those queers," need not call into question that which grants the heteronormative framework its stability. It is interesting to think about Hegel here, that after all he does not end the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the struggle for death and life as the ultimate and constitutive scene of becoming a subject. Instead, the narrative proceeds beyond the self-consciousness chapter as and the development he offers to transcend—not to obliterate, but to sublate—the deathly struggle for life; death in this light is the emergence of the sphere of social negotiation of recognition. Recognition again emerges as that to be socially orchestrated and also relieved through norms. The comment that queers "just need their struggle to come to their own identity" then could be interpreted as a refusal to engage with the question whether other forms of struggling with becoming in certain ways are possible and how precisely those norms do not merely affect "those others over there" but might be norms to which I also come to discover myself passionately attached.

In this critical vein, Butler calls for a rethinking of gay and lesbian identity formation, since "there may be an effort to disavow a constitutive relationship to heterosexuality" (*PL* 148). In defining a queer identity over and against heterosexuality, heterosexuality itself is rendered monolithic and homogenous. Since the assumption of an identified position can only happen upon the condition of a repudiation of this position, to assume a gay or lesbian position then depends on the renunciation of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, then, is that which cannot be mourned. Butler's point is "that a radical refusal to identify suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification has been made and

disavowed, whose symptomatic appearance is insistence, the overdetermination of the identification that is, as it were, worn on the body that shows" (*PL* 149).

Thus, it is "in the social foreclosure of grief [that] we might find what fuels the internal violence of conscience" (*PL* 183). This internal violence is the enactment of the attachment to the lost object that has been withdrawn into the ego, and thus the failure to avow the loss results in aggression against the ego. The loss in the world that cannot be accepted is transformed into "the characteristic lack in the ego" (*PL* 187), and the other's absence is thus translated into the ego's impoverishment. This impoverishment is the decrease of self-esteem that characterizes melancholia in comparison to mourning. Self-esteem, however, cannot exist before the splitting off of the critical agency from the ego, because only then does it become possible for the ego to be taken as a perceptual object and to be measured against some ideal. This means that self-esteem only becomes possible through the formation of that agency that also potentially destroys it. The aspect of active revolting has also to be acknowledged in melancholia through the repetition and metonymy in which "[t]he melancholic inverts against itself the indictment it would level against the other" (*PL* 190). The melancholic would level the indictment against the other precisely because of the social sanctioning foreclosing the attachment. Authority is thus undercut in the sense that it is incorporated into the conscience of the melancholic and vanishes as an external authority, leaving the other unscathed. The impossibility to avow the attachment to the other hence determines what expression the grieving can take.

The unspeakable delimits, pervades, and organizes the field of the speakable, and thus the unconscious and the conscious cannot be cast as two utterly discrete spheres. Rather, although the unconscious is out of reach of the conscious and can never be fully present, the unconscious still is absently present in the field of the conscious. Furthermore, this "presence" is an active one insofar as the unconscious structures the conscious in governing what can be conscious and what has to remain preempted. It is therefore impossible to speak about a straightforward internalization of social regulations that then reemerge within the subject as the subject's conscience. Social norms are internalized and rendered psychic only through being dissimulated and only in the movement of the turning of passionate attachments from an external object to the ego. Passionate attachments thus are always subject to social as well as psychic regulations and prohibitions and produced through them.

Butler does not suggest that the impossibility to mourn is merely a question of social norms that render certain losses unmournable and that this impossibility to mourn can be cured by relieving the regulations. That she does not say this does not mean that she does approve of or endorse the status quo and the pains of impossibilities to mourn. But she asks us to refrain from rushing to normative conclusions by pointing us to the question of what it might mean if there is an impossibility to mourn that is constitutive of our becoming. Then we cannot simply demand that we must become able to mourn and let go—Butler turns us and turns with us to the difficulty of letting ourselves being called into question in our living and in our proliferating these social norms and situations. And she asks us to hold out, to ask what it might mean to allow for the impossibility to mourn.

If I am not able to mourn and I can be and become with my inability, if I do not have to master and control my inability to mourn, then this is different from the impossibility to mourn that I cannot even speak. We can speak about this impossibility to mourn that is orchestrated by the social conditions through which we are only in general terms or with regard to others, but I cannot voice this impossibility for myself, precisely because then I would have already broken the unspeakability, then it would no longer be foreclosed. The social regulations work precisely through the psychic, but in the moment that I come to voice my suffering from these norms and oppose these norms, the social life of these norms and their psychic life are no longer coextensive. If I can cry out, "I cannot live this life, I cannot live under these conditions, I cannot live up to these ideal, I cannot play these roles," then this life, these conditions, these ideals, these roles have lost some of their power over me. I am not free from them—they might still bind and tie me, take my breath away—but this I has emerged at a distance to them.

The productivity of the prohibition, the interdiction to exist as effective prohibition, depends on that which is interdicted not disappearing as something that can be interdicted. That which is to be interdicted, in other words, that which is to be taken as an object, has to be sustained in order to sustain the interdiction, because the interdiction can only be actual if it actually functions as an interdiction. The point made by Freud and by Butler, then, is that this reinforcement brings along a rigorization of the prohibition, as both sides of the equation are threatened by dissolution if the other side is erased. The paradox is exactly that on each side

internally the function involves the other side with precisely the aim of erasing the other side, but relies constitutively on the existence and actuality of the other side. The renounced desire, therefore, becomes preserved and sustained through the very act of its renunciation.

In Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Butler finds a similar structure in the preservation of the will in the ascetic ideal of the will to nothingness, because despite the efforts of guilt to abnegate specific objects for human desire, it cannot achieve the obliteration of human wanting. Here we are arriving at an important point in Butler's own thinking about subject formation, because this dialectic movement and its surplus of power, its resistance to complete control and regulation, is the gap that is not to be closed, the place where "a story has to be told." The prohibition of these desires is what produces and preserves these desires, constituting the subject through this preemptive loss. Prohibition or regulation thus is exposed as a key agency of desire insofar as it is not "a law external to desire, but ... the very operation of desire as it turns on its own possibility" (*PL* 63). Conscience, therefore, is characterized by Freud as a force that is violently turning back on itself. Desire thus figures as "passionate attachment" that occasions and sustains subject formation. In conjunction with her reading of Freud, Butler comes to return us to conscience as "a passionate attachment to *prohibition*" (*PL* 68); the ego is then the "sedimented form," or, in other words, the "iterated accumulation," of the reflexive turning back intertwined with the inexorably social character of prohibition.

Regarding the social character of prohibitions, regulations, and norms, Butler, however, argues against the tendency to ascribe social norms an ontological priority that animates them and renders them effective on their own, divorced from the subjects who live through and in relation to these norms. The historically contingent situation of the life of social norms is their being lived—embodied, engendered, enforced through individuals and social norms and institutions that are inhabited by individuals that do not in return precede these norms and institutions. If social norms had such a life of their own completely separated from their historical situation and if the continuously becoming subject was nothing but a simple internalization of these norms, then there would be no room for changing these norms and no room for self-transformation of these subjects. Arguing against the "unproblematic internalization of punishment," Butler refutes the idea of establishing a direct correlation between the

internal force of bad conscience and the external force of punishment that is received. Instead, one has to understand the "strength of conscience" as correlating *with the strength of one's own aggression*, one which is said to have vented itself externally, but which now, under the rubric of bad conscience, is said to vent itself internally" (*PL* 70). The strength of one's conscience is derived from a redirection of obliquely prohibited desire, desire that can enter the conscious only through displacement, since all desires as a subject's desires are related to the primary foreclosure through which the subject was constituted and desire inaugurated.

Desire therefore cannot be the medium through which the subject can ever achieve utter self-transparency. Rather, the inquiry of this chapter into some psychoanalytical concepts has shown that the relation between desire and consciousness is complicated by the elusiveness of desire as the subject's own opacity. And as this opacity has turned out to be subject constitutive, we have to come to wonder and ask how precisely desires and requirements of self-transparency operate and where they come from. What does it mean for asking the question "who are you?" and "who am I?" if the unconscious, established through foreclosure and as signifier of the repressed and disavowed, is to be understood as irrecoverably other to the subject and yet pervading the subject? Finally, in the process of the internalization of social regulations, the psychic has been unveiled as an accomplice, and desire and its regulation become manifest as dialectically exploiting and sustaining each other. The complicity of desire and the psyche with social regulation is the function of a reflexivity that operates as a strange form of cultivation of a narcissistic attachment to punishment in which moral investment plays a large role, as was already seen in the account of Hegel and the defiled consciousness that needed to be redeemed. This reflexivity is understood as conscience, to be more precise, as "bad" conscience, which demands purification and redemption of the subject. The odd scene that is set here is that individuation as the initiation of the turning around of the subject and the subject's formation as self-reflexive now turns out not to be merely caught up unchangeably within the webs of social norms. Not merely does the emergence of the subject in and through subjection turn out to be a procedure to which the emerging subject is outrageously passionately attached, but the investment is not merely a libidinal one; in addition it also has moral overtones. And here the question of theorizing returns: what does it mean to offer this kind of scene of subject formation?

What precisely is the role of this "cultivation of a narcissistic attachment to punishment in which moral investment plays a large role?" The other person seems to be slipping away in this very movement of theorizing. What does this mean for thinking about the intertwinement of ethics and subject formation through casting responsibility as core to this nexus? With these inquiries into psychoanalytic theory, we have seen that the I comes to respond to the address and that the I also emerges in self-reflexivity because I am called into question. I come to ask myself "what does it mean for me to respond here? What has become of me? Who am I?"

3 Conscientious Subjects of Conscience—Nietzsche, Althusser and Circles of Passionate Attachments

In her *Adorno Lectures,* in the lecture entitled "An Account of Oneself," Butler remarks with regard to her engaging with Nietzsche in *Psychic Life of Power* and the scene of subject formation through punishment, guilt, and bad conscience he proffers, "I moved perhaps too quickly to accept this punitive scene of inauguration for the subject" (*AL* 24). So she does not utterly renunciate her acceptance of that scene; instead, she says that she might have moved too quickly to accept it. Following this remark, she returns us to Nietzsche's scene before she moves on to explain how norms and prohibitions force and enable self-fashioning and self-making. This self-fashioning becomes necessary because I am forced to enter into a relation with the norm that impels reflexivity. What does it mean though, when Butler introduces these thoughts by saying "I moved perhaps too quickly"—perhaps and perhaps not, too quickly, but when the movement itself is reaffirmed? She does not speak this affirmation, she performs it; after all, she does return us to the Nietzschean scene.

"An Account of Oneself"—Butler offers an account and yet she does not. She responds, she recounts: "Critics have argued that various recent critical reconsiderations of the subject, including those that do away with the theory of the subject altogether, cannot provide the basis for an account of responsibility, that if we are, as it were, divided, ungrounded, or incoherent from the start, it will be impossible to ground a notion of personal or social responsibility on the basis of such a view" (*AL*

28-9). And we do not know where this address came from, who these critics are, to which she responds. Does it matter from whom precisely the address came? What does it do to those who did address not to be given a name, not to be given a specific position, an elaboration of their criticism? The addressing other seems to have been lost. Does it perhaps not really matter who they, the "critics," were? Or is it perhaps that the response arrives belatedly to the scene of the address, unable to recount it, unable to offer an account of the address that could ever be "correct," "right," or even "adequate"? Are there degrees of adequacy or inadequacy?

What perhaps does matter is that there was an address and that it is staged here as an address to "various recent critical reconsiderations of the subject" and that obviously it was an effective address. It seems to have been important enough to have incited a response, to have enabled a response, and it seems to have enabled an I: "I would like to try to rebut this view in what follows, and to show how a theory of subject-formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can work in the service of a conception of ethics and, indeed, of responsibility" (*AL* 29). Perhaps this is the I who offered to us, to her audience, to her readers, the confession of perhaps having moved too quickly to accept the Nietzschean scene of the emergence of the I through an accusation. The account announced here is an account of the I accused of doing away with the possibility of responsibility. We still do not know the critics.[78] We do not know the scene of the address. The I has told us, and yet the account of the address that conditioned the I and its response remains vague. It is a fiction of this I's origins. The I emerges in response to being addressed, but this address figures as a charge—and no minor charge, but the charge of not being able to "provide the basis for an account of responsibility" and of rendering it "impossible to ground a notion of personal or social responsibility."

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[78] It would be helpful and important to attend to those debates that are invoked with reference to the critics, especially to attend to the differences in these debates. It seems that this rather swift comment might abet a certain kind of domestication of poststructuralist critiques of the subject. The rash distancing from the scene of this particular address through these debates does not quite call into question projects taking up these critiques to show how they do not really jeopardize ethical theories without allowing these theories to be thrown into crisis. Rather, these "reconciliatory" projects work towards an integration and hence seem to know from the very onset that an integration of what seems to be troubling—in this case, the poststructuralist critique of the subject—will be possible. So my only worry regarding this brief gesture towards these "critics" is that it might undermine the radical implications of Butler's project of critique as a mode of thinking and theorizing that attempts and risks its own openness.

The I that emerges here announces that it "would like to try to rebut" this criticism and sets out to attempt to perform personal responsibility—at the cost of risking failure. The I emerges in the context of a lecture entitled "An Account of Oneself" as the I strives to unclench the relation between responsibility and accountability, trying to break responsibility loose from the accountability framework, trying to speak of another, more primary mode of responsibility as a mode of our becoming. But this I undertakes its endeavors by trying to offer an account, trying to answer and account regarding an address that came from critics, and performs a breakage of the accountability framework precisely through its own running up against the limits of establishing its own accountability. Through this I that Butler mobilizes, she does indeed return us to Nietzsche and the bleak picture of the role of morality in subject formation and in the formation of moral subjects. The question then is how to read Nietzsche. How do we return to the Nietzschean scene?

3.1 Conscience, Violence, and Responsibility

Butler inquires into the notion of conscience in Nietzsche in *Psychic Life of Power* by asking how the trope of turning on or against oneself can be understood as creating the interiority that becomes the "precipitating condition" of the subject's emergence. In Nietzsche, this turning of "the will" back on itself is occasioned by a prohibition on action or expression that then creates the internal sphere that is necessary for a notion of self-reflexivity understood in terms of self-inspection. In her reading of Nietzsche, Butler characterizes conscience as "the means by which a subject becomes an object for itself, reflecting on itself, establishing itself as reflective and reflexive" (*PL* 22). Taking oneself as an object in reflecting on oneself means that there is an I that can, to a certain extent, distance itself from itself, but also, in turning back on itself, identify with itself, insofar as it reflects on itself *as itself*. The enunciation of the I then is constituted through "this capacity for reflective self-relation or reflexivity" (*PL* 22) and involves an attachment that this I forms to itself through conscience. In the conscience, the I takes an interest in itself, measuring and evaluating itself, taking itself not only as an object for reflection, but also stylizing

itself as a consciously willing and desiring subject. This self-relation of reflexivity thus is a relation of the subject taking itself as an object and reflecting on itself as a subject of desire as well as reflecting on its desires.

Nietzsche's question is not how self-consciousness comes to be transformed into or give rise to the function of conscience. Rather, he calls into question precisely this notion of self-consciousness as being more primary than conscience. His genealogical endeavor is to provoke a thorough critique, a critique of all values that does not shy away from calling the value of these values into question (*GM* 20/253). Offering us an account of how self-consciousness formed through conscience, then, is not the end to Nietzsche's story; conscience is not the foundation of the account in the sense that, with reaching the factum of conscience, the inquiry would have to stop. Rather, Butler argues that for Nietzsche, conscience is a mental activity that not only forms other mental phenomena, but is "itself *formed*, the consequence of a distinctive kind of internalization" (*PL* 63).[79] For Nietzsche, conscience is the knowledge of the sovereign individual about his or her strength of will that allows him or her to make promises; it is "the proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of ... this power over oneself" (*GM* 60/294).[80] This awareness has become so integrated in the strong individual's being that it has become a habitus, a sedimented bodily knowledge, or, in Nietzsche's wording, a "dominating instinct," and as such is called conscience. Nietzsche asks how conscience itself came into existence, showing how a genealogical inquiry into conscience becomes possible once we suspend the assumptions and concepts we have come to accept regarding conscience's existence and operations. Genealogy is not attempting to give an account

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[79] One has to keep in mind that Butler herself follows the common distinction made in phenomenology between "internal" and "interior": internal, she explains, denotes a contingent relation and interior a constitutive relation (see *PL* 203 n.9). Nietzsche in his notion of internalization seems to come very close to Adam Smith's "man within," the internalized gaze of others that leads to a split within a person's psyche and sets up an "agent-I" and a "spectator-I." The spectator is the one assuming the Humean Common Point of View and evaluating the agent; this leads to an evaluation that does not only have praise or blame at its end, but praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. To find oneself praiseworthy is to find that the others ought to praise one for the quality in question that led to a certain action. The Smithian account for how on the basis of emotivism one can come to action-guiding conclusions is intriguingly similar to Nietzsche, who then of course continues to critique this internalization since it shows the failure and arbitrariness of all morality and moralizing. The relationship of the tradition of Smith and Hume to the accounts of psychoanalysis would be interesting to pursue.

[80] The German here reads: "Das stolze Wissen um das ausserordentliche Privilegium der *Verantwortlichkeit*, das Bewusstsein ... dieser Macht über sich" (*GM* 294).

of developmental psychology that would explain how conscience is formed in a growing child. Genealogy is more radical, insofar as such a psychological account still operates with the premise of conscience having been there from the beginning, of conscience as a factum of human development.[81] In other words, developmental psychology is able to help us think and understand that conscience is not there in the individual from the beginning, but is formed over time as the young human develops. But developmental psychology does not in return ask how it came to be that this development occurred, how it came that conscience itself became part of human development. Nietzsche's genealogical technique strives to unravel precisely this— hidden—assumption and to bring it into crisis. Why should conscience be a factum of human development? Why should it have been there from the beginning? How did we ever become so certain? Did we perhaps repress, forget, make forgotten that it was the "late fruit" of a long process? Nietzsche offers us a story of that long process that depends on the formation and transformation of bad conscience, which Nietzsche offers as the internalization of punishment.

Nietzsche argues conscience to be a necessary fiction for the enactment and inauguration of the subject "without which the grammatical and phenomenological subject cannot exist" (*PL* 68). But what is this necessity? How did this necessity come about? What we are offered here is a story about the origin of the subject, but the very act of offering this story already presupposes the subject that comes to narrate its own origin. The necessity is one that is itself historical, because it would not exist if it were not for the subject's existence, but the existence of both is precisely historical and contingent. Butler suggest that Nietzsche is problematizing the very notion of the origin and the meaning of "having an origin": "Indeed, it may be that to have an origin means precisely to have several possible versions of the origin—I take it that this is part of what Nietzsche meant by the operation of genealogy. Any one of those are possible narratives, but of no single one can I say with certainty that it is true" (*AL* 50-1). We, then, cannot say that Nietzsche's story of the origin of the self-conscious subject that emerges through the operations of punishment, guilt, and conscience is the only or the true story of this origin. But it becomes equally impossible to simply

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[81] Butler characterizes Nietzsche's project of genealogy as "seeking to find out how the very notion of the

waive the demands of conscience as "merely fictional," while at the same time conscience can certainly not figure as the voice upon which one could rely as that which is ultimately true and authentic.

Nietzsche points out to us that bad conscience is different from conscience, insofar as it is the will turning back on itself with violence and in a self-castigating manner. The subject as a reflexive being is founded and formed or cultivated continuously over time by the workings of morality, which occurs as self-formation in a violent and aggressive bending against the subject itself. Butler's interpretation of Nietzsche is indebted to her reading of Hegel, who contends that the subject in its striving for purity needs to turn against its bodily self that which is recognized as transient and impure. Hegel argues that consciousness' fixation on and preoccupation with the defiled bodily self proves consciousness to be defeated and "fallen" and shows that consciousness, "far from freeing itself from him [the enemy, the bodily self], really remains forever in contact with him, and forever sees itself as defiled" (*PhS* ¶136).[82] The attempt and labor to fight against the enemy, which is precisely what self-beratement then is, therefore are endowed with value because this fight is for the purification of the impure self and, as such, is an investment in self-improvement.

The violence of this turning on oneself, if it is necessarily violent, "cannot simply be opposed in the name of nonviolence, for when and where it is opposed, it is opposed from a position that presupposes this very violence," Butler argues (*PL* 64). This position, which depends on and presupposes this violent turn against oneself, is that of the subject who is aware of this violence and who is, therefore, able to be outraged about this violence. Becoming a subject as presupposing violence, violence as fundamental seems to be not only an outrageous claim, but one that one would have to oppose in the name of non-violence. Butler asks us to move slowly; she does not say that violence is good or to be upheld and sustained. But she does ask us to hold out here and to defer rushing to refuse this account in the name of nonviolence's proclaiming resistance against violence that will move us beyond this violence. If,

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origin became instituted" ("What Is Critique?" 223).

[82] "[S]tatt frei davon [dem Feind, das körperliche Selbst] zu werden, [das unglücliche Selbstbewußtsein] immer dabei verweilt und sich immer verunreinigt erblickt" (*PhG* 174).

however, we allow the inquiry for the moment and if, then, violence is the very condition of possibility for the self-aware subject, then it is constitutive for the subject; it is then not only that the subject, acting in the name of nonviolence, would deny any turning on itself, but that in doing so as a subject, it has already subscribed to the founding violence, because this itself is an effect of this violence.[83]

Butler's question is whether it is possible that the circle of founding violence can be broken, since this circle is the inescapability of violence in subject formation: "The subject who would oppose violence, even violence to itself, is itself the effect of a prior violence without which the subject could not have emerged" (*PL* 64). With regard to this notion of a "founding violence," several questions arise, among them especially whether it is necessary to understand the fundamental moment of the relationship between individuals in terms of "violence." This question is especially pressing and jeopardizing in Butler's theory of subject formation, and she raises this question herself with regard to Levinas when she asks whether becoming ethical only through a certain violence is "the only mode for ethics, and what becomes of an ethics of nonviolence?" ("Ethical Ambivalence" 26). Does this then mean that opposition to violence becomes impossible? Is all violence then rendered indistinguishable? It seems clear that even if subject formation involves a certain violence, it does not follow by logical or any other kind of necessity that we can no longer find reasons for opposing violence. Nor does it follow that ethics and morality become impossible or that we simply have to accept the "generalized violence in any and all moral positioning" (*PL* 64), even if it may be that there is a certain violence at work in the operations of morality. What seems to follow, however, is that we will need to inquire how precisely Butler inquires with Nietzsche into the nexus between morality and subject formation and between violence and subject formation. What precisely is this

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[83] The notion of a "founding violence" as inescapable and occasioning subjectivity through intersubjectivity reminds one very much of Levinas and the wound imposed by the other that effects the self to come into being as a self. Butler herself offers very brief and preliminary considerations on Levinas in her article "Ethical Ambivalence" (*The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz [New York: Routledge, 2000] 15-28). In that essay, Butler raises the questions that have often been posed to Levinas: "How would one distinguish between a fascist demand and one which somehow affirms the ethical bonds between humans that Levinas understands as constitutive of the ethical subject?" (18). Furthermore, she wonders about the possibility and status of an ethics of nonviolence and about notions such as grace and forgiveness.

violence? How is it that morality emerges as the vehicle and medium of violence as well as of subject formation?

Asking these questions means that generalized notions such as "subject," "morality," and "violence" come into crisis and that no longer can we presume that we would know what it takes to offer a critique of violence. Rather, the task becomes that of calling into question our preconceived notions and inquiring carefully into the breakage points of what might at first seem to be a closed circle of violence and subject formation. This circle might be less closed, and indeed less a circle at all, but much more of a web of intersecting relations, thus providing multiple tears and breakage points, because subject formation in and through social relationships is never a homogenous monolith of a single unified violent act that inaugurates individuals in an ethical relation to each other. Still, if one thinks this thought consequently through, what is implied here, as it stands, is that the initiation of any relationship between persons not only involves vulnerability to each other, but also an exhaustion of that vulnerability to a certain, though incalculable, degree. What kind of exhaustion is this? What kind of performative move is taking place in refusing to separate this exhaustion, this necessary exhaustion, from the name "violence"? I cannot be without having already been touched—and not only touched, but wounded. And if you also are not without having been wounded and if our relationality depends on an openness and an exhaustion of this openness and woundedness, then does that mean that in our coming into relation with an other, we cannot but wound this other person as well as being wounded by this other person? One might want to argue that an overextending of the use of the category of violence by the deployment of "founding violence" might lead to difficulties in differentiating between noninjurious relationships and injurious relationships. But instead of refusing the thought at this point, I would like to hold out and to hold this question present as the question of violence as a primary vocabulary for subject formation—without offering a solution. But there seems to me to be a value in troubling our thinking about the distinction between violence and nonviolence as a theoretical stronghold, insofar as this troubling will sharpen our senses and return us to the problematic of the impossibility of rendering life a mere application of theory. After all, what might be experienced as noninjurious by one person might be experienced as injurious by an other person. The ethical predicament that is framed, then, is not merely that of needing to establish criteria for where

violence and abuse begin and the predicament is not merely one of communicating and negotiating the differences between different perspectives. Instead, we encounter a predicament in the fundamental unknowability and opacity to ourselves and others that renders it impossible to ever fully know and grasp the effects of actions, not only prior to acting, but also retrospectively. My words might be traumatic and wounding for you, and if the trauma and wound are retroactively constituted and that which cannot be spoken, if it is the repetition, that then institutes the trauma; there is no way for you to have even warned me, even if you had wanted to. And here my language evades the problem that surfaced earlier in this paragraph insofar as the *might* in "my words might be traumatic and wounding for you" seems to imply that there might be hope for us in a chance for me to address you in a manner that is not violent and hurtful.

The question of violence is such a burning issue precisely because it is troublesome to think the initiation of interpersonal relationships and the experienced abuse and violence as somehow no longer firmly and distinctly apart if there is a certain wounding, invading, violating happening in any interaction that orchestrates subject formation. I would like to suggest that the key to unraveling this problematic further might lie in the fact that, without thinking much about it, I wrote "my words might be *traumatic*" and with that resorted to a psychoanalytic notion. So perhaps there may very well be a certain amount of violence and invasive force in any encounter, but not every encounter ends up resonating, troubling, and stirring that which has come to reside in the unconscious enough to break through, to become conscious. Even so, if subject formation happens through an irrecoverable breaching, then being in relationship with others means, as Butler emphasizes, we are "in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy" (*AL* 101), vulnerable and passionately attached to others, to norms, and to ourselves.

The fierce and violent character of passion, retained in the notion of the passionate act as initiating relationships, does not mean that all violence then has become the same. The question of violence will always have to be examined with regard to the specific context in which violence occurs to attempt to distinguish constitutive forms and occurrences of violence from unnecessary contingent ones. The importance will continuously lie in the effort to go into the concrete situation and to labor through the details, since considerations of ethics and morality necessarily

depend on their concrete contents and contexts, the relations and situations in question. Made to stand alone as a generalized formal argument separated from its historical content, an argument for understanding subject formation as entailing a certain violence—just as well as an argument strictly opposed to such an understanding—runs the risk of becoming insensitive to precisely that which it strives to critique and to which it strives to mobilize opposition, namely, abuse and exploitation.

The important point is to examine how and where the difference lies between that violence as that which one opposes and the violence that is necessary to enable the emergence of the very subject who can oppose violence; these two forms of violence might indeed not be quite identical. The question of nonidentical violence appears to be the one Butler wants to tackle as the seemingly vicious circle when she asks, "Can that particular circle be broken? How and when does that breakage occur? And what emerges as a significant possibility in which the subject loses its closed contour, the circularity of its own reflexive closure?" (*PL* 64). Such a breakage of the circularity can only be possible if the outcome of what subjects will emerge from certain operations of social and moral norms and relations with others is not predetermined, as well as if there is a possibility of reworking those very norms and relations. This reworking, in return, must also mean a reworking of the subject itself, which is possible only if the subject is in its emergence nonidentical, if its becoming can never be quite ended or reached. Butler asserts, "[T]he formative and fabricating dimension of psychic life, which travels under the name of the 'will,' ... proves central to refashioning the normative shackles that no subject can do without, but which no subject is condemned to repeat in exactly the same way" (*PL* 64-65). So this emergent will is crucial to the reworking and refashioning of the conditions of its emergence, it is never quite bound by these conditions, but it can never get fully beyond their restrictive function either, because it is precisely this "shackling" that orchestrates the formation of this will.

This possibility of reworking can only be mobilized insofar as the process of subject formation is not brought to a conclusion, but, in a sense, for subject formation, subjectivating subjections have to be continuously iterated. But if I am constantly only becoming, if I am repetitively only emerging as myself and never arrive at a stage where I have fully become and where my being is secured, then how can I risk

myself? If I am constantly being ruptured, falling apart, and becoming without being able to control or master my becoming, how can I respond and act responsibly? How do I come to reflect on myself and my actions as mine and as actions for which I might be responsible? Responsibility seems to require not only a certain self-knowledge, but also this self-knowledge in responsibility requires and at the same time perhaps inscribes and brings about this I as extending itself over time, coming to stand in for an I that might emerge through these actions in the future as well as for a past I that is taken to have acted. With the question of what it means for me to be held responsible and to hold myself responsible, we return to passionate attachment and violence as not only at issue in becoming subjects in relation to others, but also in relation to oneself. And here we are returned to Nietzsche's challenge that Butler offers us in *Psychic Life of Power* regarding the nexus between violence and the formation of self-reflexivity and self-constancy through the subject's turning on and against itself.

The question, however, arises how such a turning on itself is to be thought and how exactly it should be induced. Butler suggests the turning as an "internal bending of the psyche against itself" (*PL* 67) that can be seen in the figure of "a body that turns on and against itself" (*PL* 67). This means that the formation of the psychic and the somatic is realized in a chiastic figure, the inauguration of the former only to be understood in terms of the latter and vice versa. The body hence is fabricated as the site of contestation where the psychic and the social are mediated and negotiated. This does not mean there is a triadic split between the body, the psyche, and the social, but rather they have to be understood as implicated within each other, irreducible to each other and constitutive of each other. The relations of constitution have to be cast as dynamic processes rather than as static relations, and central for the dynamic is the figure of the reflexive movement through which sustains and reforms the "I."

This turning back on itself, as has been argued, is constitutive of the subject, but as a process of *production* it is also, as Butler contends with Nietzsche, the "condition of the possibility of fiction, fabrication, and transfiguration" (*PL* 67). Butler alludes to an interpretation of this "condition of the possibility of fiction, fabrication, and transfiguration" as understanding the self-reflexive and the self-reflective subject as a kind of auto-poiesis that cannot ever be fully in my hands and ever fully self-willed. But being turned back on myself time and again, I am compelled to recast my relation

to myself and to the addresses and norms through which these addresses operate. I can become only insofar as I am dispossessed of myself, and my self-fiction can become mine only insofar as I am giving it away: "I am compelled to give the account away, to send it off, to be dispossessed of it at the very moment that I establish it as *my* account" (*AL* 49). In her reading of Nietzsche in *Psychic Life of Power,* Butler does not expand on the creative and generative dimension of the auto-fictional account of the self. In her *Adorno Lectures,* however, she does engage with the possibility and necessity of giving an account of oneself. She briefly gestures at the impossibility to fully equate an account with a story of oneself, but her interest is the narrative component that any account of oneself has to draw on in order to explain and render plausible that account. Her discussion focuses on the account and accountability in the face of the inexorable opacity in the face of an other. It would be interesting to ask how this discussion links to the story—what does it mean to offer a story?—and to attempt to think about the role of remembering, imagining, crafting and being crafted as oneself in terms of story and plot. In the *Adorno Lectures* Butler makes several passing comments regarding the importance of narration, but does not expound on the crafting of stories, not because it does not occur to her, but because it seems rather that she is trying to show the crucial importance of the interruption, disorientation, falling apart, and failing of these stories in the face of the other. Her argument appears not to be that she assumes that narration is not worth reflecting on, but simply that it will always take place. But precisely because she conceives narration as a precarious endeavor, precisely because she understands life as not sustainable in a fully nonnarratable environment or as a fully nonnarratable life (*AL* 72), Butler worries about making room and time for the interruptions and disorientations of stories and story-telling. In *Psychic Life of Power* possible points of departure for thinking about fictional stylization and understanding oneself as having a story that spans time are provided by Butler in her discussion of Nietzsche's account of the turning being conscience and conscience's introduction via the notion of promise.[84] The promise

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[84] A very interesting and promising project would be to examine in this regard Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* (Trans. Kathleen Blamey [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992]), where he argues two poles of identity, sameness as *idem*-identity and selfhood as *ipse*-identity with regard to a subject's permanence over time. The two figures of mediation of these two poles or aspects of identity are having character and keeping one's word. While in the permanence of character *idem* and *ipse* come to an overlapping, in the permanence in

comes to figure as crucial in Nietzsche's account of the emergence and fabrication of individuals insofar as to be able to promise requires a constancy or memory of the will. This constancy, in return, is not natural but has to be brought about, and here violence as well as the Niezschean punitive scene return, or perhaps we are finally returning to it: in the constancy of the will, the self-conscious subject emerges through a turning of the will *against* itself as "bad" conscience, the qualitative form of the act of turning brought about through the formative entrenchment in social relations.

3.2 Nietzsche, "Promise," "Guilt," and "Bad" Conscience

Nietzsche explains that the self-constancy of the willing subject is constituted through a reflexivity of the will that occasions the proliferation of the will. The will is capable of taking itself as an object, thus forming a certain kind of reflexivity in which the will binds itself to itself. Through this self-bondage over time, and regardless of the circumstances, the will thus constitutes its self-identity in the form of self-constancy through reflexivity. For Butler, following Nietzsche, this self-bondage is performed in the promise in which the utterance in which one gives one's word is renewed regardless of change, regardless of what one might want at a later point in time, until one finally acts upon one's word. The agency that ensures the constancy of the will and thus the keeping of one's word is "good" conscience over and against "bad" conscience as potential failure in keeping one's promise. The question that jeopardizes the aspect of autonomy of the will in this "self-bondage" is in how far this fabrication of self-constancy goes "in the service of a social regulation that requires the production of the subject [as] a consequence or an expression of bad conscience" (*PL* 65). Posing this question does not mean arguing that all promises are operating only in the service of social regulation and so we need to liberate ourselves from all sorts of promising. Promising works through norms and regulations that I did not

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form of keeping one's promise the gap between *idem* and *ipse* is exposed, as keeping one's word as an expression of self-constancy is the figure in which selfhood frees itself from sameness. Ricoeur furthermore argues "an intervention of narrative identity in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character ... and the pole of self-maintenance" (*OA* 118-119).

make nor you, the one or ones to whom the I offers the promise; the social norms exceed us. But, in promising, I am becoming complicit with precisely these norms that enable my act, and if there is no doer before the deed, then I can emerge only through and in complicity with these norms and regulations. Even so, we still have to ask what precisely this necessary complicity is, this complicity with social regulations without which no subject can be.

Understanding the underlying specific social regulations as contingent and historical opens up the possibility for us to ask what forms of life are excluded in whose service and why it could not as well be otherwise. Butler suggests that "Nietzsche offers us a political insight into the formation of the psyche and the problem of subjection, understood paradoxically not merely as the subordination of a subject to a norm, but as the constitution of a subject through precisely such a subordination" (*PL* 66). This constitutive aspect of the passionate reflexive bind through regulation makes it impossible to even think a departure to an "unshackled will or a 'beyond' power" (*PL* 66) could be achieved. Rather, we need to inquire what the conditions and operations of the passionate attachment of the will to itself are. What does it mean that over time I come to be in relation to an other—fictive or real, perhaps even myself as this other—by making a promise? I make a promise to you, I say that I will stand in for my word, I will hold firm and deliver. I have nothing to offer but my word, and for the promise to be a promise in the fullest sense, you cannot demand anything but my word and I have to dare my word. How are promises kept and what does it mean to "keep" a promise? For Nietzsche, as we will see, the passion with which promises are kept against all odds and despite changing circumstances rely on bad conscience, which is the internalized anticipation of punishment for breaking the promise. The shackles of bad conscience are the condition of the emergence of the self-reflexive and self-reflective subject; bad conscience turns the subject not only on itself, but also makes self-constancy possible. But bad conscience is not something preceding the subject; rather, here we meet the intertwinement of social and psychic. As Butler explains, self-constancy as an effect of conscience turning back on itself thus proffers us an understanding of the will as "the site at which the social implicates the psychic ... *as* its very formation and formativity" (*PL* 66). Understanding the psychic as "formation and formativity" of the social provides the key to Butler's main argument that social norms are not simply internalized, because the subject as such

does not precede the norms and so can then internalize them, but that the distinction between internal and external comes into existence through regulation. Regulation is that which the tropological movement performs, a movement that is passionately enacted and, as self-consciousness itself, emerges as desire. This attachment to regulation produces the formative turn, but we cannot assume an active, conscious subject that consciously decides to subject itself and castigate itself. Rather, it seems that a strange seduction to subjection is at work here, but the agent of the enforcement of subjection is not simply social norms and regulations or another person who straightforwardly demands of me "subject yourself!"

The capability of making and keeping a promise, as Nietzsche argues in the second essay in the *Genealogy of Morals,* entitled "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like,"[85] depends on an active forgetfulness that produces a counterforce, namely, a *Gedächtnis*, a memory. In the case of making a promise, forgetfulness, which Nietzsche characterizes as "a form of robust health" (*GM* 58/292: "eine Form der starken Gesundheit"), has to be suspended; otherwise, the promise could not be kept. This suspension of forgetfulness "involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression ... but an active *desire* not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real *memory of the will*" (*GM* 58/292).[86] For Butler it is especially important how this "continuity of the will" is established by "an 'impression' that is actively sustained by a desire" (*PL* 71). The combination of continuity and constancy maintained by the strength of the will constitutes a promise as a promise, but the promise is merely a promised promise until, finally, the act promised is completed. This moment in which the promised act is carried out and the promise fulfilled, however, is also the moment of the promise's death and in a sense

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[85] In the German original the chapter is entitled "'Schuld', 'schlechtes Gewissen' und Verwandtes."

[86] "[K]eineswegs bloss ein passivisches Nicht-wieder-los-werden-können des einmal eingeritzten Eindrucks, ... sondern ein aktives Nicht-wieder-los-werden-*wollen*, ein Fort- und Fortwollen des einmal Gewollte, ein eigentliches *Gedächtnis des Willens*" (*GM* 292). Especially interesting is that in the German original, the phrase "passive inability to rid oneself of an impression" reads "passivisches Nicht-wieder-los-werden-können des einmal *eingeritzten* Eindrucks" (my emphasis); the *eingeritzt* is dropped in the English translation, although it becomes important for Nietzsche, and for Butler in her discussion of Nietzsche, that the impression is made with some force that carves its image into the will and thus also entails a notion of injuring or penetrating. The notion of imprinting, inscribing, carving in of that which then is remembered is also discussed in Paul Ricoeur's study *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit: Erinnern—Vergessen—Verzeihen,* trans. Andris Breitling and Henrik R. Lesaar, introduced by Burkhard Liebsch, Essener Kulturwissenschaftliche Vorträge 2 (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 1998).

when the will collapses onto itself. The promise as well as the promising animal both depend on a kind of openness of the promise. Only if there is the possibility to fail, to break the promise, then the "active desire not to rid oneself" of that which one once willed and promised can be sustained. The projected temporal interval that separates the instance of giving the word and delivering the action allows for changes in circumstances and "accidents" of fate to take place, but instead of yielding to the altered situation, the will is promised to remain firm in reproducing itself identically. While fulfillment is anticipated and implied in the promise, in the service of producing the promising subject it cannot be fully actualized and completed.

For Nietzsche the holding firm is indicative of the "strong" and "noble," as opposed to the weak ones who make false promises, i.e., those who promise but are unable to stand fast and deliver. Therefore, the "promising being is one who stands for himself through time and whose word continues through time, one 'who gives [his] word as something that can be relied on because [h]e know[s] himself to be strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents'" (*PL* 72, quoting from *GM* 60/294).[87] The considerations of the promise in Butler provide a pathway for a examination of the role of self-constancy in self-formation that allows a consideration of memory as a figuring force that creates a sense of retrospection as well as anticipation.[88] This memory, however, is not a natural trait of human beings; it is an active capacity and is created through a continually painful injury: "If something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in; only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory" (*GM* 61/295).[89]

If memory is created and sustained by an ongoing painful impression, we still have to ask what exactly this "memory of the will" is. What is this impression in the case of the promise? What are the circumstances and mechanisms of its infliction?

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[87] The Nietzsche quote in the original: "der sein Wort giebt als Etwas, auf das Verlass ist, weil er sich stark genug weiss, es selbst gegen Unfälle ... aufrecht zu erhalten" (*GM* 294).

[88] It would be interesting to turn to the phenomenological notions of retention and protention in order to pursue the role of the formation of self-constancy in relation to the question of the perceived extension of the subject over time. This would mean examining the role of the two poles of the horizon of the experienced and the horizon of the expected between which subject formation is constantly negotiated. In terms of the fabrication of the self-conscious subject, this would mean relating the notion of *Gedächtnis* (memory)—as belonging to time in its constitutive union with forgetting as the destructive work of time—to the notion of *Erinnerung* (remembering)—as mediation between lived time and its narrative configuration.

[89] "Man brennt Etwas ein, damit es im Gedächtnis bleibt: nur was nicht aufhört, *weh zu thun*, bleibt im Gedächtnis" (*GM* 295).

How is it sustained, how is the *desire* not to forget produced, if this desire must mean a desire to inflict pain on oneself? What does it mean if the self-reflective subject emerges through a repetition of violence and pain? What does it mean to offer such a scene of subject formation? Nietzsche speaks about the "severity, cruelty, and pain" that accompanies promises, and this severity, cruelty, and pain is the sting of bad conscience that has to have been there at the first to enable the possibility of promising. But for "the 'free' man, the possessor of a protractible and unbreakable will" (*GM* 60/294)[90], the accompanying "cruelty" is not perceivable as cruelty or pain, because he is proudly conscious of his privilege of being able to promise and of the awareness of his strength that has become his "dominating instinct." This instinct is what "this sovereign man calls ... his *conscience*" (*GM* 60/294),[91] and thus the creation of the memory of the will through the infliction of pain is disavowed in the name of the freedom and strength of the "sovereign man." In the sovereign man, a transformation seems to have happened: The bad conscience that painfully coerces the will to extend over time and hold firm has become conscience and is now apparently endowed with positive value. The question here, then, seems to be how "bad conscience" becomes seemingly "other" than conscience in its characterization as "consciousness of guilt." Butler asks with Nietzsche whether conscience is then indeed *other* than bad conscience and beyond the primary accusation and inscription of guilt. By asking whether "there [is] a way for the will to become regular, to become the protracted continuity which underwrites the promise, without becoming subject to the logic of bad conscience" (*PL* 73), Butler suggests that if bad conscience were really other than conscience, it would have to be utterly other to the will, because conscience is the will turning back on itself. Then, however, there would have to be an alternative for the will to become calculable and reliable, as in the case of self-determined self-constancy, and this alternative would have to account for the possibility of keeping promises independently from a memory of the will created through bad conscience. But if, as Nietzsche argues, there is no other way for the will to become constant than through self-inflicted pain that creates memory, then this self-regulation that is named "bad conscience" cannot be *other* and exterior to conscience,

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[90] "[D]er 'freie' Mensch, der Inhaber eines langen unzerbrechlichen Willens" (*GM* 294).

but has to be in an interior relation, inseparably bound up with and constitutive for conscience itself.

If bad conscience is established as an effect of the power of norms that are the product of social relations and also at the same time as an effect of the self-sustenance of conscience, of the will, then bad conscience has to be figured as not only as the yoke "my" environment, "my" history has inflicted upon me. Rather—and here it becomes clear how Butler reads Nietzsche through a psychoanalytic lens—I have an investment in the self-imposition of bad conscience. This means that to ask for a departure towards being "beyond bad conscience" or, more generally, "beyond subjection" is not that easy, because it means an undoing of myself, radically risking my social and psychic life. Butler with Nietzsche offers to us our turning on ourselves in the form of self-beratement as a "matter of life or death"—social and psychic, exposing that we might be passionately attached to our "bad" conscience, which in return offers us a way and means of pleasure in individuation.

But at the same time, as these attachments are exposed as formed, the question of their necessity returns. Is there another way of emerging as a subject, as a conscious subject? Nietzsche's genealogy of bad conscience decenters the moral subject, but decentering does not mean obliteration. Perhaps it is through this disorientation that a conscious and conscientious subject can possibly emerge, not in a way that is utterly untainted by the operations of bad conscience and social norms, but in a way that enables this subject to emerge at a distance from the conditions of its own emergence and to risk them, transform them, repeat them, but not quite in the same way twice. But in order to inquire what such a possibility could look like and how it is to be brought about, we need to inquire how precisely the social norms figure to instigate the formation of bad conscience. Bad conscience that constitutes the possibility of the memory of the will is a self-punishment in awareness of guilt. This means that the consciousness of guilt not only has to arise, but the consciousness of guilt has to become consciousness of *one's own* guilt, whatever this guilt may be and whatever one may come to find oneself guilty of.

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[91] "[D]ieser souveraine Mensch heisst ihn [diesen dominierenden Instinkt] sein *Gewissen*" (*GM* 294).

Nietzsche's approach to this issue is to wonder what kind of guilt we are encountering in bad conscience and how this guilt came about. He contends that it is not that there is first the person aware of his/her guilt that then is punished, but he inverts the relation: punishment is used as a means to "awaken the *feeling of guilt* in the guilty person" (*GM* 81/318: "das *Gefühl der Schuld* im Schuldigen aufzuwecken"). This means that the one who is to be punished is found guilty by someone else first. The guilt encountered and established need not be some objective guilt; it merely needs to be effective guilt, as Nietzsche lucidly explains with regard to the witch trials: "That someone *feels* 'guilty' or 'sinful' is no proof that he is right. ... Recall the famous witch trials: the most acute and humane judges were in no doubt as to the guilt of the accused; the 'witches' *themselves did not doubt it*—and yet there was no guilt" (*GM* 129/376).[92] In fact, Nietzsche suggests, guilt in the first place was a debt, *Schulden*, in the material sense, and only later this material debt became invested with moral value and became guilt, *Schuld*. The idea of justified punishment springs from the relation between debt and guilt, rendering guilt calculable and thus something one could pay for in the currency of punishment (see *GM* 62-63/297-98). This relation is explained in the exchange between creditor and debtor in which the question is how to account for the creditor's desire to punish the debtor. Summing up Nietzsche's argument, Butler points to the rationalization of this desire by means of attributing "moral accountability" to the debtor and concluding that "with that notion of 'accountability' emerges a whole panoply of morally saturated psychic phenomena: intentionality, even certain versions of the will itself" (*PL* 73).

In this account it is the creditor who ascribes the debtor intentionality in his or her actions as well as the potential of being held accountable for the action in question; the debtor's becoming a moral agent and so invested with agency and responsibility here is fully dependent on the other, namely the creditor.[93] This ascription happens as a strategic movement in order for the creditor to justify his or her action against the

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[92] "Damit, dass Jemand sich 'schuldig', 'sündig' *fühlt*, ist schlechterdings noch nicht bewiesen, dass er sich mit Recht so fühlt. ... Man erinnere sich doch der berühmten Hexen-Prozesse: damals zweifelten die scharfsichtigsten und menschenfreundlichsten Richter nicht daran, dass hier eine Schuld vorliege; die 'Hexen' *selbst zweifelten nicht daran,*—und dennoch fehlte die Schuld" (*GM* 376).

[93] At this point it might be worthwhile to consider the parallels between Nietzsche's creditor and debtor and Hegel's lord and bondsman.

debtor.[94] The creditor thus is self-inaugurating in his or her moral subjectivity by the act of rationalizing his or her own action via ascribing the other, the debtor, with the status of a partner in the same capability of responsibility and accountability. The problem arising here, however, is where the desire, the passion to punish, emanates from, since the fact of a broken contract cannot fully explain the visceral reaction. Butler asks, "Why does the creditor take pleasure in the infliction of injury, and what form does that pleasure take when injury is inflicted in the moralized action by which the creditor holds the debtor morally accountable and pronounces him guilty?" (*PL* 73). And one might come to wonder what precisely this movement of "moralizing" and this morality is that is implied in the creditor's *moralized* action of then not only holding the debtor accountable, but *morally* accountable. By offering the creditor-debtor scene, Nietzsche calls into question morality in the sense of an operation that allows for the rationalization of pain and retribution by appealing to "justice." In return, then, notions of justice as retribution are lead into a crisis as well as notions conceiving of morality as a calculus of justification and retribution.[95] Butler's inquiry in *Psychic Life of Power* focuses on the question of what kind of subject and what kind of view on subject formation we are being offered by Nietzsche. Suspending the question of what notion of morality is implied in the *moralizing* of the move that will link the creditor's desire for punishment to a kind of rationality of justice, the issue that lies prior to this operation that of the desires at work. Without this desire and the pleasure of the creditor—as well as that of the debtor—the rationalization in the name

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[94] In the context of guilt and discussing bad conscience, the action inflicted by the creditor is clearly punishment, but it would be interesting to pursue a similar argument with regard to the attribution of a reward and its inaugurating function concerning the receiver and the issuing person. A reward as a reward given to a person for an action works to acknowledge that person's decision and action and thus in a positive way holds a person accountable for his or her action. In a theological discussion, one could raise several questions at this point. How then is the phenomenon of unconditional love and justification in the theological sense of justification *sola gratia* that does exactly not depend on merits to be thought? What happens when unconditional love and justification are no longer thought as a simple fact, a plain truth, but opened towards their eschatological horizon and thus are relevant more as enabling hope and belief that renders that in which one places one's hope true at the same time as it initiates one's being human? This does not mean that faith is being deconstructed as "just" a fiction of the origin which therefore has no truth and no value and no truth value. But it seems that within a concept of truth that emerges on the horizon that is constituted as mediation of fictionality and reality, the fiction of the only truth will be suspended, insofar as such a perspectivizing will show how as believing subjects exactly such subjection is necessary as the inauguration as believing subjects.

[95] In her 2002 *Adorno Lectures,* Butler takes up this thread and critiques understandings of responsibility that would tie responsibility to the possibility of accounting for one's actions in the sense of attempting to justify them.

of some equilibrating justice could not even take place. The question that Butler asks us to consider is what it is in the subject that renders it so open to the desires and pleasures bound up with punishment and how the connection between pleasure and the "attribution of guilt" works.

The attribution of guilt by the creditor that leads to and justifies the infliction of punishment on the debtor had been interpreted as a proper response to the debt by the creditor that was understood as an injury the debtor caused to the creditor, but, as Butler notes, "the response takes on a meaning that exceeds the explicit purpose of achieving compensation" (*PL* 74). The creditor's motivation is not merely justice in having the debt repaid in some fashion, but that the pleasure arising from punishment originates in the desire for reparation and "the infliction of injury is construed as a seduction to life" (*PL* 74, see *GM* 66-67/301-3). This "genuine seduction *to* life" (*GM* 67/303: "einen eigentlichen Verführungs-Köder *zum* Leben") is cast as a process in which the debtor becomes aware of his or her guilt and thus becomes redeemable through suffering the punishment. For there actually to be punishment, or a cause for punishment, it seems that there has to be a promise that has already been broken; the debtor must have failed to protract his or her will. Also, the attribution of guilt by the creditor is not yet a full account for the emergence of bad conscience, because that involves the self-attribution of guilt and so a certain self-reflexive movement or, as repeated so often, the "turn against oneself."

This points to the second aspect in the process of the formation of bad conscience, namely, its dependence on internalization and fabrication. The operative agency here, the psyche or, in Nietzschean terms, the soul, is formed by internalization of instinct when an instinct is not acted on immediately. This internalization that leads to that production of an ideal is understood as a "primary artistic accomplishment" (*PL* 75), thus an achievement of self-socialization that is a self-stylization under the force of social pressure. In the story that Nietzsche proffers, the arrival of society and sociality renders it impossible to simply act upon basic drives, because "all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward*—this is what I call the *internalization* of man: thus it was that man first

developed what was later called his 'soul'" (*GM* 84/322).[96] The instincts turned back against the being itself cause the "self-shackling" of the subject in the form of bad conscience. This takes the form of a "self-taming" of the subject, and this means that alongside the self-shackling an ideal of the self has to be produced in this process to which the self holds itself up. The process here parallels the psychoanalytical account of the production of the ego-ideal, which the ego strives to approximate. "This fabrication [of an ideal] appears to take the place of the promise," Butler argues, "the word actualized as deed, and to emerge on the condition that the promise has been broken" (*PL* 74-5). This displacement appears to be crucial in the process of the formation of the "noble" subject that knows about its responsibility, the "late fruit," namely, the strong will that allows one to promise and that, to be effective, presupposes a forgetting of its emergence. Conscience, then, is in the first place a site of awareness of responsibility for actions that one comes to acknowledge as one's own, since in the process of the production of this responsibility, the violence of the punishments, the turns that initiated this responsibility, has been dissimulated and disavowed as bad conscience, sedimented as conscience that is neither good nor bad in the first place.[97] With this transformation that led to the fabrication of the individual that is aware of itself in general and aware of itself as an agent in particular, memory has been transformed and extended into remembering, a kind of remembering that involves an anticipatory aspect, namely, that of imagining oneself as the agent of some action.

The conditions of the emergence of this subject that were exposed as involving punishment, the creation of a sense of "guilt," and 'bad' conscience relied on the central notion of promise and, as it turned out, on a promise that necessarily had to be already broken in some ways for the subject to emerge in the first place. This means that it has to be presumed that the institution of the promise already exists, so that a promise can be interpreted as drawn on by both the one making the promise and the

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[96] "Alle Instinkte, welche sich nicht nach Aussen entladen, *wenden sich nach Innen*—dies ist das, was ich die *Verinnerlichung* des Menschen nenne: damit wächst erst das an den Menschen heran, was man später seine 'Seele' nennt" (*GM* 322).

[97] Werner Stegmaier characterizes this quality of conscience as follows: "Gewissen ist, noch bevor es ein gutes oder schlechtes Gewissen ist, Wissen von der Bedeutung des eigenen Handlens für andere, *vor* dem Handeln, vor allem aber auch *nach* dem Handeln" (Werner Stegmaier, *Nietzsches "Genealogie der Moral"* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994] 132).

one to whom the promise is made, and so that it can be known what it means to keep or break a promise. In Nietzsche, on the one hand, the promise already seems to be instituted as worth striving for, since that is a privilege of the strong and noble being, because only the strong can keep their promises. Only those have the *right to make promises* who have a will that is independent and extended in constancy over time (see *GM* 59/293). The ideal that already exists, then, is that of the being that keeps its promise. On the other hand, the promise seems to arrive as an institution with the socialization and organization that produces the state from the "raw material of people and semi-animals" (*GM* 86/324: "Rohstoff von Volk und Halbthier") when social order is introduced that requires and produces stability. Butler in her reading of Nietzsche therefore casts the relation between individuals in terms of a promise owing to the inevitably social nature of relations between individuals.

If the interiority that is the self is produced by the internalization of punishment, which is the turning of the will against itself, then the self as self cannot be apart from this self-constituting practice and necessarily depends on bad conscience to become itself. Bad conscience as continuous self-beratement that sustains the interiority of the self and as ongoing self-infliction of pain functions as the condition of the possibility of memory. This pain, however, is not a simple institution of pain, because its cause, the social conventions that led to the punishment, has been internalized and so it becomes a pain caused by "self-shackling" in the name of morality. This self-shackling is then an activity that in afflicting pain on oneself gives rise to pleasure or, in Butler's own terms, "becomes, under the pressure of the social contract, an internalized pleasure, the joy of prosecuting oneself" (*PL* 75). Punishment, therefore, is internally linked with the production of the self, and "this very productivity of punishment is the site for the freedom and pleasure of the will" (*PL* 75).

This does not mean that we could simply interrupt the mechanism by asking to stop the internalization of these regulations, because, as Butler elucidates through turning to Freud, social regulation and psyche are accomplices in my becoming. Key to Butler's project is to ask "how ... cultivating a narcissistic attachment to punishment [can] be the means by which the power of social regulation exploits a narcissistic demand for self-reflection which is indifferent to its occasion" (*PL* 78). The libidinal attachment to prohibition emerges, because the activity of negating a certain bodily impulse or libido proffers a certain gratification insofar as the very

impulse that is curbed is preserved in this curbing as the object of this activity. Hence, prohibition and repression are sustained by the reemergence of the libido that is prohibited. The link to Nietzsche becomes clear when one considers his account of the self-preservation of the will with regard to the work of guilt that strives "to deny a specific kind of object for human wants, [but] it cannot obliterate the wanting character of humans" (*PL* 78). Butler offers us here the subject vulnerable to self-punishment and subjection, because the will would rather turn on itself than not will at all. Formulated in psychoanalytical terms, this means that because repression is always a libidinally invested process, it can never fully obliterate the libido, but libido, therefore, becomes that which enables and sustains its own subjection and punishment.

This self-punishment, inextricably bound up with sanctioning practices in the social and the self-conscious subject, cannot then simply transcend the realm of sociality, but it emerges as passionately attached and desiring its conditions of emergence, as painful as that might be. But what is "the social" or "sociality," and what does it mean to emerge in subjection? The scene Nietzsche offers is that of subject formation constitutively asymmetrical, which raises the question of power and what it means to emerge as a subject through and in the "underdog" position and, even more so, through and in being passionately attached to this position? And what happens when this underdog position is invested with moral worth? Is Nietzsche scoffing at this moral masochism and narcissistic investment? But if he offers us the social as a network of relations between individuals that can be understood in terms of promises or, due to power differentials, as always carrying aspects of the creditor-debtor relation, and if we all are inescapably bound up with this sociality in our becoming, is Nietzsche then scoffing at himself as well? If punishment is inflicted because of the breaking of a promise and if this punishment undergoes the internalization that is the fabrication of bad conscience, then bad conscience as the continuous self-formation by self-infliction of pain is, on the one hand, dependent on the primary breaking of a promise and is, on the other hand, the condition of the possibility of the memory of the will. Bad conscience is that on which the keeping of the promise negatively depends, because by creating interiority, by being the will turning on itself, bad conscience is the discontinuity against which continuity is produced. In Butler's words, bad conscience is characterized as "the fabrication of

interiority that attends the breaking of a promise, the discontinuity of the will, but the 'I' who would keep the promise is precisely the cultivated effect of this continuous fabrication of interiority" (*PL* 75). Emerging as that which knows of the freedom that means dissolution of the "I," bad conscience is a function of a memory of the will. This shows bad conscience as not really *other* than conscience, which is the self-constancy performed in and constituted by the promise, because the promise depends on the memory that sustains the "long chain of will" (*GM* 58/292: "die lange Kette des Willens"). But not only is bad conscience implied in the conception of the promise, but the promise also is a constitutive part of the emergence of interiority, since its result is the enunciation of an I that protracts across time in becoming continuous with its deed.

The figure of the promise thus elucidates how the trope of turning on oneself denotes the production of interiority that becomes the "precipitating condition" of the subject's emergence. This turning of "the will" back on itself is occasioned by bad conscience that then creates the internal sphere that occasions self-reflexivity. The question pending here is whether it is possible to think another form of promising and self-constancy that does not depend on punishment and bad conscience. Butler is quite clear on how to answer this when she points to the understanding of the psyche, the soul, as "the effect of imposing a form upon oneself" (*PL* 76), which then means that "there can be no protracted will, no 'I' that stands for itself through time, without this self-imposition of form, this moral laboring on oneself" (*PL* 76). The underlying assertion here, interestingly, is that the social, outside of which and independent from which there can be no subjectivity and no self-formation, is cast as constitutively bound up with morality in the form of injunctions, duties, rights, and norms. The Butler of the *Adorno Lectures* picks up on the question of ethics and morality as core to subject formation, but attempts to show that there is an openness to others and a relationality that is in important ways different, but not completely separate from demands of norms, duties, and rights.

To speak of a kind of primary ethical exposedness and relationality does not mean that we could recuperate a notion of the good or the good life as a foundation for ethical theory prior to the workings of norms. Rather, there is no immediacy, no uncompromised good; concepts of the good life are also constituted through the normative framework in which they emerge. All that we can argue as good as well as

all that we can argue as normative is already bound up with and constituted through the frameworks of our social and historical conditions of subjectivation. Thus, to inquire into the nexus between ethics and subject formation as well as into the modes of address and response through which subjects emerge, we must ask how the social frameworks and mechanisms come to adjudicate these addresses and responses and what this means for subject formation.

3.3 Althusser and Interpellation as Performative Subject Formation

In *Psychic Life of Power,* Butler inquires into Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, which provides an attempt for understanding how the address by an other may be bound up with and enabled by social frameworks. One of Althusser's core interests is to ask how subject formation is a kind of production that is implicated in the reproduction of the subject of labor power as well as the reproduction of the citizen subject. For this kind of subject formation to work, Althusser suggests that the subject's emergence is not only linked to the subject's being addressed, but also to the authority of this hailing voice through which the subject is compelled to emerge through specific behaviors in specific positions in the social. As a key scene Althusser proffers the subject as being hailed by a policeman—"Hey, you ... !" The subject then turns around and, in turning around, reinstitutes the authority of the one calling and assumes the name that it has been called. The subject is thus inaugurated as a social being, both because and despite the punitive and reductive function of the hailing. In *Psychic Life of Power,* Butler wants to understand Althusser's doctrine allegorically, figuring the call "as a demand to align oneself with the law ... and an entrance into the language of self-ascription—'Here I am'—through the appropriation of guilt" (*PL* 107). Thus, Butler announces that in her rereading of Althusser, one focus will be the interplay of conscience and law involved in this subject inauguration, and only by way of implicated inherence does she also theorize the relation to the other. It would not be doing justice to Butler's work to argue that she renders fully abstract the aspect of the social norms and regulations functioning as a "cultural realm which both constitutes and mediates the subject's relation to itself" (*CHU* 172), since she gives very incisive

and insightful analyses of concrete examples of regulation, most famously those regarding the negotiation of desire, sexuality, gender, and identity in her treatment of these in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* and in her analysis of the performative power of speech acts in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, as there she discusses concrete examples of hate speech and the anti-pornography argument made by feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon. And, in fact, it would be mistaking Butler's approach if one were to reduce these concrete instances to examples that merely come to illustrate a general universal idea Butler attempts to argue.[98]

Althusser's inquiry into interpellation is embedded in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in which he seeks to analyze the reproduction of the subject of labor power and scrutinizes the subject-formative function of ideology. The efficacy of ideology that interpellates the subject depends, on the one hand, on the mode in which this ideology operates in the social, namely, by the other's voice, which demands the subject to turn to the law. On the other hand, precisely because of this mode of effectiveness, through an accusative call, the efficacy of ideology hinges at the very same time on an openness of the addressee to the call that is intertwined with an appropriation of some kind of a strange "guilt," since otherwise the accusation could not affect the interpellated. For the appropriation of this "guilt" to be possible, a notion of conscience has to be formed. As an effect of the tropological movement itself, conscience, as argued by Nietzsche, cannot be theorized as a pre-given subject's turning back on itself, by which an external law is internalized. Conscience, in

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[98] This question could be taken into the direction of inquiring into the role and status of the examples in Butler's theorizing, as it has been done by Laclau, who argues that "a content is an integral part of a concept, while something, in order to be an example, should add nothing to what it is an example of, and should be substitutable by an indefinite number of examples" ("Identity and Hegemony," *CHU* [44-89] 64). The examples he gives for his argument are quite enlightening with regard to the difficulty of drawing a clear line: "If I say: 'Jews are responsible for the national decline,' 'Communists are defenders of the interests of the masses,' or 'Women are exploited in a patriarchal society,' it is evident that all three can be examples of the agreement between subject and verb in a sentence, without the grammatical rule being altered by the semantic content of the examples" (*CHU* 64). As Laclau is ready to admit, the problem comes in with the fact that such utterances are always embedded in a discourse, and although the examples may not change the content of the particular rule that is under discussion, within the larger context of the discourse the particular examples may very well operate as a conceptual aspect underneath the surface. At this point, one is reminded of the textbooks for mathematics in Germany under the Nazi rule, in which suddenly math problems ranged from how long it would take an army to make it from point A to point B to how many pills were to be delivered to a particular institution to perform euthanasia on a certain number of disabled persons. What

restricting what can be represented and what has to remain unrepresented, makes the subject available to the inaugurating reprimand that spawns the reflexive subjectivating turn. And yet this conscience is itself inaugurated by the injunction. The main problem thus is to understand the twofold turn of the subject, both back on itself and to the law. The turning to the law, however, cannot be separated from the turning to the other, because the law would have no subjectivating force if it were not for the hailing performed by the other. But while the law's force needs to be animated by persons, there is an evacuation of this personal character possible, perhaps even necessary, for the law to achieve its full administrative and regulating force. The presence of the hailing other, then, is transformed into an illusionary but powerful omnipresence of this other's voice who is the law speaking.

In asking how society, how the framework of norms and matters of course can form subjects, Althusser is interested in understanding the reproduction of the conditions of production and, in particular, in the reproduction of the subject. The formation of the subjects of labor power, on the one hand, depends on and takes place through the learning of "techniques and knowledges" (*ISA* 127) as well as of the "'rules' of good behaviour" (*ISA* 127) by which the subject's attitude and conscience is formed in accordance. On the other hand, apart from the mastery of knowledge, it is necessary for society to function to reproduce in the subject obedience to the ruling ideology. The mastery of this obedient practice is indispensable so that the subjects are capable "to perform their tasks 'conscientiously'" (*ISA* 128). This *conscientious* performance of acquitting oneself in accord with the ruling norms and principles becomes important for Butler in interrogating the underlying workings of conscience as self-restriction and the underlying complicity of conscience with precisely those norms that curb and restrict. With regard to Althusser's proffering the workings of ideology as subject formative, the question then arises what "ideology" comes to mean and how it comes to affect subject formation. What does it mean that I come to life only within and through the operations of ideology? How can ideology—how can ideologies—come to have material effects? In response to these questions Althusser offers an account of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (*ISA*s), which he regards as

surfaces as an example here under the flag of arbitrariness and interchangeability serves at a deeper level to

"realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (*ISA* 137) that provide the socio-ideological framework in every state in and by which societal subjects are generated. Althusser's list of ISAs comprises the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA, and the cultural ISA (see *ISA* 136-137). The ISA must be distinguished from the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) because there is only one RSA—or, in Foucaultian parlance, one might say there is one ruling hegemonic power—but there exists a plurality of ISAs that subvert the public-private split. The RSA primarily works on the basis of "violence" and coercion, whereas the ISAs predominantly depend on and function by ideology. So it might seem as if ideology works in a nonviolent manner, but Althusser makes clear that the two modes of functioning can never be neatly separated and that there always is a "double 'functioning'" (*ISA* 139). The relative unity among the plurality of ISAs is achieved "*beneath the ruling ideology,* which is the ideology of 'the ruling class'" (*ISA* 139). Subject formation depends on the function of ideology, which brings subjects into existence, insofar as ideology is understood as representing the imaginary relations of the real relations of subjects to their conditions of existence. Ideology, then, for Althusser, as opposed to Marx' understanding of ideology, is, interestingly, not immaterial.[99]

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determine the content and to form the students' and teachers' frame of mind.

[99] This does not mean that for Marx there is a strict split between immateriality and materiality from the beginning. Rather, language in the beginning is actually bound up directly with material life. In *The German Ideology* (ed. C. J. Arthur [New York: International Publishers, 2001]. Translation of "Die deutsche Ideologie." *Werke* 3 [Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969] 5-530), Marx and Engels argue that language is in the first place bound to material reality: "The production of ideas, conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life" (47). Language hence is not only bound to material reality and human self-actualization in the material production of their means of existence, but language as well as this material activity is also, from the very beginning, social, in other words, with and for other individuals. At the stage where mental and material labor are not yet separated, even the "mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc." are not severed from the material conditions and activity of the individuals, but from "the direct efflux of their material behaviour" (47). For the role of language regarding our experience of things, this means that there is a "material behaviour" that is a relation with other individuals and external things. Our consciousness therefore is practical, because it is directly bound to praxis. The interaction with and experience of material reality, things, and other individuals constitutes and *is* language. As *practical* consciousness, consciousness thus establishes the link between external, material things and the text, but the material groundedness of consciousness as practical guarantees the accuracy of the link.

The problematic of alienation and language that can distort arises for Marx with the division of material and mental labor, where consciousness is autonomized and "*can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the

In ideology the real relations in which individuals live are not straightforwardly represented because what is perceived as "reality" is always already an interpretation, and thus "all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion ... above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them" (*ISA* 155). While for Marx there is a reality outside ideology and a relationship to reality that is not distorted by ideology, matters are not quite as clear for Althusser. In arguing that ideology *represents* something, he seems to imply that there is something else and that then gets reiterated and reinstantiated in ideological representation. This something is the "(imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production" and the derivative relations; "imaginary" is in parenthesis, leaving it open whether there is such thing as a nonimaginary reality that could then undergo ideological distortion. But as Althusser will expose a few pages later in his essay, "there is no practice except by and in an ideology" (*ISA* 159). Hence, Althusser argues against imagining a nonideological practice, a reality that would not be produced through ideology. This means that there is no truth, no untainted outside to ideology.

And ideology thus also only exists in the form of *lived* ideology, i.e., in the form of individuals embodying, inhabiting, acting on their ideas and beliefs, which are necessarily always emerging only through and from the greater societal framework in

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formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc." (51-2). No longer is consciousness necessarily grounded in the material life-process, but there is a split between practical and "pure" consciousness. That which the autonomous consciousness produces no longer is directly linked with the material reality and therefore the concepts that are produced by it are no longer linked with material reality. Still, at this point in Marx' text, consciousness is only *able* to distort, and language and concepts can *possibly* be severed from the material conditions of production. However, a few lines later, Marx makes clear that "the division of labor implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity ... devolve on different individuals" (52), thus implying that practical and immaterial consciousness are not only possibly, but *factually* and necessarily embodied by distinct individuals as long as the division of labor is not ended. Since "[l]ife is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (47), then those performing "intellectual labor" necessarily will produce language and ideas that are severed from the material conditions of labor.

The problem for Marx then is not that there are concepts and theories produced, but that they are autonomized with respect to the material reality. While alienation is not merely material but also ideal, insofar as self-conscious self-actualization becomes impossible as the laborer is alienated from his or her work, this alienation does not mean that ideology is the cause of this alienation. The cause remains the division of labor; ideology can precisely not *constitute* alienating conditions of labor, but is a symptom of them. Yet ideology can and does occlude these material conditions and their transformability, and thus ideology confounds attempts to transform the conditions of labor. The crucial mistake of the Young Hegelians therefore is to think that by critiquing and changing the concepts, it could be possible to effectively transform the material situation (see 58-9). This criticism does not mean that critique is not important in the sense of ideology critique, but that change is only brought about by changing the material conditions, which means ending the division of labor.

which they exist. Althusser reframes Marx here and undoes the rigid split between the ideological superstructure and the nonideological material base, because for Althusser ideology itself cannot have an immaterial life of its own, but is entrenched in materiality. The actions of individuals are embedded in the larger context of practices that owe their meaning and effectiveness to their interweavement with rituals. On the level of the ritual, then, it is the ideological apparatus that governs the grammar of these rituals. The ideological apparatus effects the intelligibility and effectiveness of the rituals. But how does ideology "form" "subjects"? For Althusser, the link between ideology and subject formation lies in the connection between the acting of the subject and ideology's governance of practices on which individual actions depend for their meaning and communicability: "ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, in which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief" (*ISA* 159). Practice, ideology, and subject are therefore inseparably intertwined. If we want to inquire into the breaking points—breaking points as those where distinctions, differentiations, and reshapings become possible—then it is necessary to ask how precisely this intertwinement of practice, ideology, and subject works.

At this point in his argument, Althusser introduces the examination of subject formation through the scene of interpellation: "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (*ISA* 162). Ideology here takes up a life of its own and is personified as addressing, like an individual. This addressing or hailing singles out "concrete individuals as concrete subjects." The category of the individual, nevertheless, is an "abstract" category only with regard to the subject, because one always already exists as subject. Existing as a subject, living and interacting with others in one's context, seems to be an obvious fact of life for all of us, and it is this "obviousness" that Althusser calls "the elementary ideological effect" (*ISA* 161) of recognition. He mentions ideological recognition as "one of the two functions of ideology" (*ISA* 161), with the other one being "misrecognition—*méconnaissance*," which alludes to Althusser's Lacanian influences. Recognition is gained through ideological interpellation, and it is actually gained and brought about through ideology, so Althusser does not offer ideological recognition as a faulty recognition. Ideology offers recognition, but it is always bound up with misrecognition, insofar as it always is bound up with the belief that full recognition could be conferred onto the

individual. But individuality is perhaps that which precisely escapes recognition, because recognition can only happen in social terms, in terms that are general and eluding the individuality. Althusser emphasizes that, as subjects, we "constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (*ISA* 161-2). The scene of being interpellated is staged by him as that of being hailed by a policeman while one is walking down the street. Upon hearing the call "Hey, you there!" one turns around, and by this turning around, one becomes a subject due to recognizing oneself as addressed and due to reacting to the address.

Althusser points out that the effectiveness of the being hailed "is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by 'guilt feelings'" (*ISA* 163); it is this phenomenon of a strange kind of "guilt" around which Butler's inquiry centers and that has resonances with primordial responsibility in Levinas, because that which turns the subject around, that which renders it "guilty," does not correlate to an act of the subject. Although not calling this interpellation "performative," Althusser explains it as such when he stresses that the temporal succession the scene of the being hailed on the street sets up is deceiving. There is no individual that walks along as an individual and that preexists being a subject; rather, "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, ... *individuals are always-already subjects*" (*ISA* 164). Consequently, the individual before interpellation is the fiction of an existence outside ideology, the belated fiction of an original scene and of that which exists prior to being hailed. Interpellation is performative in the Butlerian sense, then, because it produces what it is said to interpellate.

The way ideology works in interpellating subjects is secured by the formal structure of ideology—the logic of ideology—which Althusser takes to be the same for all ideologies, as he states in explaining why he will only discuss "the Christian religious ideology" (*ISA* 165). With regard to this seeming side-comment, Butler wonders whether Althusser's theological examples do in fact merely serve an illustrative function and so could be replaced by any other example, since "the performative force of the voice of religious authority becomes exemplary for the theory of interpellation, thus extending through example the putative force of divine naming to the social authorities by which the subject is hailed into social being" (*PL* 114). The question thus is whether in Althusser's doctrine of interpellation, the divine

and absolute interpellating power is reinstalled because the effectiveness of the hailing voice depends on the sanctification that installs the authority of the name in which the hailing occurs.

If as subjects our entire existence is owed to and determined by the workings of ideology, how then can we act other than as string puppets in ideology's theatre? Althusser sees this question very clearly and stages it as paradoxical, because, on the one hand, being a subject involves the notion of free and responsible agency and, on the other hand, being a subject involves the notion of being subjected to the authority on which the subject's being depends. Althusser retains the subject's freedom by arguing that the submission as an avowedly *free* submission due to the necessary function of misrecognition that comes into play here. Subjects end up to "work by themselves" (*ISA* 169) because the inaugurating subjection by ideology is disavowed, and necessarily so, because otherwise subjects could not be interpellated as *free* subjects. The necessary misrecognition and thus my necessary exceeding the terms by which I am interpellated and through which I am formed do not yet account for the possibility of resistance or opposition against ideology, and it seems that here Butler's argument, following Foucault regarding the multiplicity of power relations and following Derrida regarding the phenomenon of slippage to which all reiterations are subject, could work to highlight that subjects are not determined by an interpellating ideology. After all, Althusser himself does not capture ideology as a monolith, but clearly emphasizes the plurality of the ISAs; nevertheless, he does not link his argument for the "free subject" to this plurality. Despite these arguments, which regarding the Butlerian account of agency and resistance will be examined more closely in the subsequent chapters, the question that remains is how to account for *voluntary deliberate* action, since the necessary disavowal of the forced, *nolens volens* subjection does not seem sufficient to clarify how subjects can voluntarily deliberately act. A theory of subject formation will have to deal with this question; at this point in the inquiry, however, we are only concerned with Butler's use of Althusser's theory of interpellation.

In her reading of Althusser in *Psychic Life of Power,* Butler engages with the scene of interpellation where the encounter with the other is staged as an accusatory encounter that one did not bring about oneself and from which one cannot simply withdraw oneself. Rather than focusing on the other as another person in this subject-

formative encounter, Butler centers on the voice that names and, one might want to add, that names violently in the name of the law. She is interested in the responsiveness to the call that inaugurates the subject in the turning around and that initiates the intersubjective mediation between second-person ascription and self-ascription. What seems enigmatic, though, in this scene remains the responsiveness of the one who is hailed by "the 'voice' of the law" (*PL* 107). This responsiveness seems to be intimately connected with the notion of conscience, but it is that "strange phenomenon ... which cannot be explained solely by 'guilt feelings'" (*ISA* 163). Butler's project is to trace why the turning takes place through the subject's "anticipating the conferral of identity through self-ascription of guilt" (*PL* 107).

One might be inclined to point out that Althusser also mentions the situation of the naming and that being addressed by one's name does not necessarily entail a reprimand. Firstly, however, one is to understand this movement as "tropological," not only in the way that it is a *tropos* in the sense of an actually performed turning around and thus limiting subject formation to situations of actual encounters in which one is called upon from behind and actually turns around, although subject formation cannot be separated from the actual social life in which one is encumbered and constantly struggles to become. The turning demanded and performed there, however, is always orchestrated by norms and signifying rules, and hence the movement also has to be understood as tropological in the figurative sense, working beyond the surface since, as "exemplary and allegorically[,] ... it never needs to happen for its effectivity to be presumed" (*PL* 106). Secondly, in any situation of being addressed, as soon as one turns around or reacts in some way, one obviously feels compelled to do so; in other words, there has to be this primary responsiveness as a kind of openness to being addressed that Butler seeks to examine. Thirdly, because in all subject formation a certain amount of violence is involved, she is concerned about how the distinction can be made "between kinds of injury that are socially contingent and avoidable, and kinds of subordination that are, as it were, the constitutive condition of the subject" (*ES* 26). Butler herself, however, does not give an account of how this distinction is to be made, because it is not possible to enumerate general principles of evaluation according to which cases then have to be judged. It is much more a radically situational task that requires going into the individual cases and opening the inquiry into the basics anew every time.

The core question, then, to be asked is this: Where does constitutive subordination take a form that is not necessarily injurious and harmful? What forms of life are foreclosed? What is the cost of becoming a subject? To make an inquiry into the occasions of subject formation possible, Butler seeks to grasp this compelling force that makes one respond to the other. In her *Adorno Lectures,* Butler inquires more into the scene of the address as implying a you and an I and the openness to an other person. These relations cannot—as Butler emphasizes—be understood as closed dyads, but rely on and are implicated in the norms of intelligibility that regulate and facilitate the conferral of recognition. In *Psychic Life of Power,* Butler's inquiry centers more around the question of how precisely it is that one responds so readily to these norms and the demand to become complicit with them. For this orchestration to be successful, it is necessary that there be some sort of prior openness, availability, and vulnerability to these norms. In connection with Althusser, Butler casts this openness to being addressed by these norms as a readiness to identify with the one who transgressed the norms or who broke the respective law and is therefore hailed by the police in the name of that law.

The trope of the "necessarily already broken" is reminiscent of Butler's discussion of the promise that has to already have been broken in order for the subject to emerge as a subject that is capable of the memory of the will and so to emerge as a self-conscious subject at all. Butler points out that "[i]ndeed, the law is broken prior to any possibility of having access to the law, and so 'guilt' is prior to knowledge of the law and is, in this sense, always strangely innocent" (*PL* 108). This innocent guilt that is guilty innocence at the same time is interlinked with the constitutive desire for the law that makes the emerging I an inherent collaborator with the law. For the I to critically inquire into the workings of the law therefore always means to risk one's own existence in this critique.

The scene of the institution of this existence is not only invoked in the figure of the hailing by the state authority, but in the course of his argument, Althusser explains it further by employing the scene of divine naming. On this theological stage, the addressing happens through God, who interpellates the individual by naming that individual and by the respective individual's answering the call. Althusser notes that "there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, i.e. God" (*ISA* 166). This

Subject is self-defining ("I am that I am"), and the interpellated subjects are mirrors or reflections of the Subject, "made *in the image* of God" (*ISA* 167), as they become interlocutors with the Subject by responding to the call. The necessity of the response, the elementary ideological recognition, exposes the "doubly speculary" (*ISA* 168) structure of ideology. Ideology is speculary because it sets up the relation between the interpellator and the interpellated as a mirror structure in which the interpellator is the original and initiator. However, the interpellator is only rendered original and initiated in the recognition as such by the interpellated, and thus Althusser calls the structure of ideology *doubly* speculary. This second mirroring is the necessary move in which ideology as being ideological is disavowed and in which the subject is subjected to the Subject. Althusser sums this argument up by listing that "[t]he duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously: 1. the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects; 2. their subjection to the Subject; 3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; 4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen—'*So be it*'" (*ISA* 168-9). Existence is there constituted and sealed by the linguistic sign, the name. In the scene on the street, it may very well then be that "one has already yielded before one turns around, and that turning is merely a sign of an inevitable submission by which one is established as a subject positioned in language as possible addressee" (*PL* 111). This means for the question of the origins of the subject that the narrative that strives to grasp and explain them, to unravel and guarantee them, always necessarily comes too late in the sense that it always has to "presume the grammatical 'subject' prior to the account of its genesis" (*PL* 112). Reading this together with Butler's explorations into psychoanalytical theory, we can understand how this belatedness and retroactive inscription of the subject are bound up with the inability of the subject to give an account of its origin, which at the same time does not preclude the possibility of narrating one's origins. Perhaps the impossibility to account compels the striving to remember that of which no memory can be had—the origin of the self.

Rather than examining question of the formation of a self-concept with regard to the dimension of the irrecoverable origins being a nonnarratable and yet compelling narration, Butler in *Psychic Life of Power* angles for the presuppositions and

mechanisms implied in Althusser's theory of interpellation.[100] An important precondition she is interested in is the psychic disposition that the one who is hailed on the street obviously needs to have in order to respond to the law and turn around: what is it that compels this "turning to face a voice that calls from behind" (*PL* 112)? And what does it mean to proffer desire as answer to this question? This desire then must be a certain "desire to be beheld by and perhaps also to behold the face of authority, a visual rendering of an auditory scene [...] that permits the misrecognition without which the sociality of the subject cannot be achieved" (*PL* 112). This desire thus is linked to becoming visible, and in this sight through be*holding* there seems to be a certain amount of stability achieved that might be that which propels the desire. But at the same time, Butler points out that there is an intertwining of metaphors and senses: the auditory is not enough; instead, the scene seems to have to be validated and consolidated visually. It appears as if I need to see and face the one who called me. Yet, interestingly, it is precisely this rendering visual that in Butler's argument is said to permit the failure of recognition. This failure of full recognition is not detrimental to becoming social; rather, it is cast as condition of the possibility of becoming social. Becoming a social being, then, depends on a certain misrecognition insofar as it is "a false and provisional totalization" (*PL* 112) that allows for the ideological recognition of oneself and the other as subjects. Drawing on Althusser's notion of ideology as doubly speculary, it is possible to understand the necessary misrecognition as precisely the second mirroring movement that disavows the first mirroring movement, in which the subject is constituted as subjected by ideology. It is only owing to the second mirroring that this subjectivation can be cast as a willed one, and thus owing only to this misrecognition is ideological recognition possible and the sociality of the subject inherently so. What then are the implications for our being in society? What does it mean that, in being recognized, this recognition is entangled in a kind of misrecognition? The impossibility to be fully recognized and become one with the sign under which one comes to stand becomes the resource on which we draw to

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[100] In her *Adorno Lectures "Kritik der ethischen Gewalt,"* especially in the second of the three lectures, Butler engages with precisely this problematic of the constitutive disorientation propelling subject formation through the impossibility to conclusively narrate one's own origins. Butler remarks, "Indeed, it may be that to have an origin means precisely to have several possible versions of the origin—I take it that this is part of

transform the terms and norms by which we are instantiated as social beings. This does not mean that then the fight could be for the elimination of misrecognition; rather, it is about transforming the mechanisms of subjectivation—some misrecognitions are more violent than others, but recognition also carries a certain violence—being hailed, being addressed, having to take up that name that is not mine and craft a future from it, I have to comport myself towards the ISAs through which I am formed. We cannot simply rid ourselves of their histories, but we can transform their operations precisely because their operation is engendered through its provisionality.

In Althusser's argument, the interpellation and thus the becoming social are connected to an accusation or at least to the implication of an accusation of having trespassed. Social existence thus "can be purchased only through a guilty embrace of the law, where guilt guarantees the intervention of the law and, hence, the continuation of the subject's existence" (*PL* 112). At this point in Butler's narrative, "the law" seems to become quite totalizing, insofar as there appears to be no other way to become in the social than to relate to the law. And does this embrace necessarily have to be *guilty*? Does the law otherwise have no force, since the guilt is that which "guarantees the intervention of the law"? What kind of "guilt" is this guilt before the law? It seems as if we are encountering a Kafkaesque moment in Butler here, where, as in Kafka's *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*), it is never clear whether the subject before the law is truly guilty or guilty on what charges, but the subject emerges before the law through its vulnerability to the accusation and it emerges as a subject through endless exercises in establishing its innocence. Subject formation in turning towards the interpellation of "the law" yields a being and becoming only absurdly before this law and in its embrace, where it is never quite clear whether the law is embracing the subject or the subject embracing the law. And in this strange embrace, a certain stability, a continuity, a self-reflexivity become possible.

This self-reflexivity that is constituted by the embracing of the law and self-ascription of guilt depends on ideology's forming the subject's conscience, "where the notion 'conscience' is understood to place restrictions on what is speakable, or more

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what Nietzsche meant by the operation of genealogy. Any one of those are possible narratives, but of no

generally, representable" (*PL* 114). Conscience, as it has been argued before, is not a reflexivity that pre-exists the turning to the law, but it is the reflexivity that emerges as the turning is performed. As formative self-restriction, conscience is not simply an internalization of a previously external law, because such a distinction would presume the prefiguration of an "internal" and an "external," or in other words, there would have to be a subject that precedes the self-restriction. Butler insists instead that "this self-restriction is prior to the subject" (*PL* 115), by which she seems to invoke the "prior" not to argue for a self that would be distinct from the subject, but rather to expose the paradoxical situation that cannot be grasped as the relation of precedence thought in terms of a succession in time. To account for the formative process without instituting the law in its signifying content as a transcendental that is removed from the social, it is necessary to understand self-restriction and the subject as emerging at the same time, because it is by taking an object, namely, the subject, that restriction as restriction can come into being in its specific form and content. Conversely, the subject as subject comes into existence by and through this self-restriction that truly is a *self*-restriction because of the autoanimating effect. And yet, this auto-poiesis is not truly an autonomous activity, but it is possible only in response to being addressed.

Butler's interest in this performative turning centers around this responsiveness to the conferral of guilt that is necessary for this self-restriction and consequently for interpellation to work. "Conscience," she reaffirms, "is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen-subject, for conscience turns the individual around, makes him/her available to the subjectivating reprimand" (*PL* 115). There are two turns, then, that are irreducible to each other, the turning back on oneself and the turning towards the law that reduplicates the reprimand. Perhaps we have been moving too quickly here, though, since the effect of the utterance "Hey, you!" is not quite yet a reprimand. This does not mean that the interpellation's becoming a reprimand is solely the conjecture of the one being addressed who ends up hearing the address as a reprimand, as an accusation. But *Excitable Speech*[101] would probably ask *Psychic Life of Power* to move not quite so quickly and would perhaps try to insert itself into the closure that appears to happen here, in order to re-open the

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single one can I say with certainty that it is true" (*AL* 50-1).

interpellation. *Excitable Speech* insists that there is a gap between the utterance and its effects, and while this gap can be factually obliterated, it is—precisely because of the precariousness of this gap—crucial for the possibility of resistance, of talking back, of looking for the points of breakage to keep this gap open and not to render the address and its effect fully continuous. What might enable the I that finds itself hailed to refuse to hear the address as reprimand, and exercise perhaps a certain *ascetic* interruption—as the I refrains from rushing to feel accused despite the address's force propelling the addressed toward receiving the address as a demand to justify, explain, acquit?

The question of responding to the interpellation becomes a matter of how to speak properly. Hence, an opening towards misappropriation that can be a reappropriation in the refusal to speak properly takes place, but insofar as this improper act is intelligible as *improper,* speaking this response does work to sanction the interpellation. So for conscience and thus for the interpellation to be successful, the linguistic skill to "speak properly" is required. Becoming a subject, then, is a twofold entry into language: it is necessary both to be addressed and to achieve mastery of the rules of language. The linguistic skills that need to be mastered exceed the merely linguistic because they are both proliferated in and constitute the rules and attitudes of the subject.[102] This mastering of the code is, at the same time, a submission to exactly this code, and therefore "the more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved" (*PL* 116). This leads Butler to formulate the core of her theory of subjectivation, which captures "the condition of possibility for the emergence of the subject ... [as] the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission" (*PL* 117). The paradox is emphasized by the grammatical difficulty that arises here, for to speak of submission as well as of mastery, there is the grammatical need to fill the subject position and thus institute a subject who both undergoes submission and who masters. The solution Althusser seeks recourse to is the introduction of the "individual" as a "placeholder," and so he can retain the subject as always-already actualized. Since, however, the subject, although always-already

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[101] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[102] The proliferation of the linguistic skills in the nonlinguistic but nevertheless discursive will be explored further in Chapter 5 with regard to Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*.

interpellated, at the same time depends on the reiteration of this interpellation, the actualized subject is not a self-identical being, but the term "subject," as well as "individual" and "person," is to be understood as a "linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation" (*PL* 10).

The question that arises, then, is "what, prior to the subject, accounts for its formation?" (*PL* 117), and Butler gestures towards the linguistic skills through which the subject is reproduced. This does not mean that Butler argues for an understanding of language or linguistic codes as pre-social, but that language and linguistic skills are inescapably social and historical precisely because their existence depends on their social and historical usage. The social skills need to be mastered, as Althusser points out, for the subjects "to perform their tasks 'conscientiously'" (*ISA* 128). In the French original, this reads as "*pour s'acquitter 'consciencieusement'*" (French original quoted in *PL* 118), and Butler links the moral overtone that is not kept by the translation "to perform" to the necessity for the subject to react properly when interpellated. Mastery of social skills, then, serves as a response to the accusation properly, to "acquit oneself 'conscientiously' [...], to construe labor as a *confession of innocence*, a display or *proof of guiltlessness*" (*PL* 118; my emphasis). The subject is thus preceded on the one hand by the social framework, the social relationship, and on the other hand by that strange kind of guilt that continuously hails the subject into existence and ties up the becoming of a social subject with the incessant reproduction of the skills needed to acquit oneself. But this confession is a peculiar one, since one ends up *confessing* innocence, which is not quite the same as proving one's innocence. The conscientious laboring then emerges as the practice and proof through which one's innocence is established. Laboring and learning the rules and mastering them do not only include acting accordingly, but it is also an embodiment of the rules that is a reproduction that goes beyond merely using the skills as tools. This does not mean that the subject becomes the mechanistic embodiment of the grammatical rules, but it is clearly also not the case that the subject voluntaristically appropriates the rules and rituals of action available. Every performance, as the notion of the ritual suggests, exceeds the subject in its meaning and effect, since its interaction and interreaction with subsequent performances cannot be foretold. The repetition and *conscientious* compliance is propelled and constituted by the "compulsion to 'acquit oneself,'" and this means, as Butler points out, that "prior to every performance is anxiety and a

knowingness which becomes articulate and animating only on the occasion of the reprimand" (*PL* 119).

The question arising here is what it means that in Althusser the necessary responsiveness to being interpellated casts conscience as the anxious desire to be that is "exploited" by ideology. What is this ideological exploitation apart from which there is no living? Conscience, as Butler offers in her reading of Althusser, is not an indolent entity, but exists as practice actualized as self-restriction and self-acquittal. This primary availability, which turns the subject around, forming it in performing the actions that are inserted via practices in rituals, is unveiled by Butler as underlying subject formation and as underdetermined in Althusser. Butler aims to mobilize this account by pointing to the dependence on its iterability for the ritualizing operation of interpellation to work, which exposes not only the possible misrecognition in interpellation and recognition, but a necessary moment of misrecognition without which the interpellation could not be repeated. Interpellation cannot work without this necessary misrecognition that is the necessary failure of ideology to achieve its materializing and totalizing aim and effect. This misrecognition bound up with recognition figures as an exchange of recognition in interpellation, because in turning around I acknowledge the other as hailing, the other as a subject who calls me, and thus I also acknowledge the authority of the other. That recognition of the other is involved here can be easily seen by looking at the cases where misrecognition takes place: for example, we think we were called, but it was just a random noise. An example invoked by Butler is the one of a radiator making a sound that one hears as a "Hey!" and one turns around precisely because one acknowledges the sound as being uttered by someone (see *PL* 95-6). Another situation is hearing one's name called out loud, for instance, in a supermarket; one turns around and recognizes that the addressee is someone other than oneself, yet one nevertheless turned and acknowledged the authority of the addressing other. Hearing one's name spoken out loud in a public place usually has the effect that one reacts to it. Or one might indeed be meant to be addressed by the other, for example, in being hailed "You bitch!" or "You liar!" and one might respond by protesting and claiming that the other must be mistaken, but in the act of protesting, one already recognizes the authority of the other to name and one accepts the conferral of this identity, even though it might be a misrecognition. Since the hailing gains its subjectivating force only because of the

imputation and assumption of a guilt that appeared to precede the subject, the question with regard to this guilt of "already having broken the law" is what kind of law this is, what kind of a demand the subject has always already failed to fulfill. Since this guilt had been exposed as being connected with the fabrication of bad conscience as well as being dependent on the interaction with an other, the question that follows here is again what role ethics and morality play in subject formation and in return what this role might imply for how we come to theorize ethical theory. With regard to interpellation, these questions shift the perspective towards that other by asking who this other is, what founds this other's demand, and how this other comes upon the subject.

4   Facing Levinas

The priority of an other, some kind of otherness, an other who calls, interpellates, touches, demands, desires has emerged and reemerged throughout this inquiry as that which propels and animates subject formation. There could be no subject without an other, without others and without the intricacies and difficulties that come along with our being always already implicated in each other's lives, bound by others and binding others. The other who summons the subject—the primary injunction, the accusation, that forms the subject by demanding its response, which figures as a primary responsibility—is at the core of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who casts the subject as constitutively dependent on the call of the other and argues this relation as an inevitably ethical one. Up to this point in Butler's work her encounters with Levinas have been brief, but most certainly intense—especially in her *Adorno Lectures* and perhaps even more so in her short essay "Ethical Ambivalence." Both Levinas and Butler tarry with the other that orders, demands, signifies with might as being at the heart of subject formation; both solicit the question "how to read? how to let oneself be addressed by these theorists?"; both do not shirk from presenting narratives that impose themselves on the readers' minds with the power of "a terrible beauty born" in exposing abysses of subject formation. In Levinas—and especially in

the Levinas of *Otherwise Than Being*—this abyss is the infinite responsibility for the other, yielding an insomniac subject who has no possibility to hide from this responsibility, no break, coming ever too late to the face of the other. In Butler and especially in the Butler of *Psychic Life of Power,* the abyss is pleasure in subjection, the passionate attachment of the subject to subjection, to the prohibitions that inaugurate the subject and at the same time demand and incite inescapable castigation. The other, however, seems in that earlier work to become very quickly assimilated into the agent of the law, to become the embodied demand of the social norms, the personified social regulations. With the *Adorno Lectures,* Butler returns to the idea of interpellation and once again addresses the subject's emerging through a constitutive openness to being addressed, to being called to respond despite the subject's radical incapacity to respond fully adequately and timely. The question that resurfaces here again is that of the role and status of responsibility in subject formation in terms of responsiveness and responsibility towards an other, which cannot be reduced to responsiveness and responsibility towards norms and rules. In Levinas, this latter kind of responsiveness and the question of justice and laws can emerge only on the basis of a prior exposedness and responsibility towards being addressed by an other.

Levinas offers an account of the other's overwhelming and interrupting the subject, expelling this subject irrecoverably from its place. In theorizing the subject as emerging through primary responsibility for the other, there can be no subject other than through being enjoined by the other outside all possibility to choose or decline this responsibility. But if this overwhelming priority of the other as constitutive for the emergence of the subject is the case, is it then still possible to begin by inquiring into *subject* formation in Levinas? Would making the other a central issue in asking about subject formation simply reestablish the subject at the center of thought? The difficulty in engaging with and writing about Levinas and subject formation lies deeper than merely in the complexity of Levinas' thought. Levinas inquires into and brings into crisis the notion of the self-conscious subject as autonomous by exposing the subject and its consciousness as nonoriginal and fundamentally dispossessed because it is constitutively and irrecoverably traversed and troubled by the encounter with the other. Understanding consciousness as the core or beginning, *arche*, of the

subject entails a "being's losing and rediscovering itself as a *theme*, exposing itself in the truth" ("Substitution" 80).[103] In other words, if starting with consciousness as that which has to become ecstatic so that it can recoup itself, then the account of subject formation yielded will be one of an enterprise of self-coincidence and self-possession. The loss of oneself into language is already determined by the rediscovery of oneself as oneself. Subject formation viewed in this way is neither an uncertain nor a risky journey, because "it is always a self-possession, sovereignty, *arche*" ("Substitution" 80). No interruption, no unanticipated encounter with an other is possible, because any interruption, any encounter with an other, will be in the service of the subject's finding itself in and through the other. Yet the subject finds itself not as self-coinciding and sovereign with regard to its journey of becoming, because it is impossible for the subject to recover the story of its own origin. We do not begin self-sufficiently and we cannot ever give a full account of our insufficiency and prehistory. There have been others in our lives and we have been in others' lives before we could remember and especially before we could remember what we might have done to them.

The question, then, is how to begin, when the beginning is precisely that which is a non-beginning, a non-origin, *an-arche*? How to write about the emergence of the subject, if such an endeavor has to mean attempting to recuperate subjectivity and telling a story of the origins of subjectivity? As Butler emphasizes in her *Adorno Lectures* (see especially 87-8), it is not that we cannot offer an account of the formation and becoming of the subject, but we must keep in mind and attend to the fact that such an account can impossibly be ultimately true and beyond all uncertainty. While this does not mean that all accounts will be indistinguishable and considered equal, the impossibility to arrive at a final incontestable account of subject formation does indeed mean that the motivation and aim of a philosophical account of the subject and its emergence cannot be to provide and justify an ontological truth. The aim of a theory of subject formation cannot be to find the truth about how to think the subject. Rather, the aim and motivation for thinking about subject formation are

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[103] Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution," *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), 79-95.

precisely the predicaments of being and becoming in the face of the reality of suffering and violence and the predicament of silent cries of pain passing unheard.

If the question of subject formation is thus not a merely metaphysical question prior to and separate from the question of the conditions of a livable life, then the question how we think the subject and who gets to emerge as a subject in what way delimits the parameters of what kind of ethical theory becomes thinkable. Thus, there is a constitutive difference regarding whether one begins to think the subject and its agency as primordially conditioned by its right and responsibility to survive, by its rights and duties in response to norms and rules, or by its responsibility towards other persons.

While Levinas' criticism of the common notion of the self-reflexive and self-present subject as the foundation of the subject—and especially the moral subject—can be understood as compelled by a commitment to ethical theory, it would be too hasty to claim that he is writing primarily an ethical theory. In *Otherwise Than Being,* he considers ethical language as the language to which a phenomenological attempt is compelled, if it aims "to express the unconditionality of a subject, which does not have the status of a principle" (*OTB* 116). This is not to say that Levinas' thinking might not be "concerned with ethics at its heart" or with thinking ethics as a "first philosophy," but the question, then, is what it means to conceive of a first philosophy and what it means to conceive of that first philosophy as "ethics." What does it mean to be concerned with ethics with regard to how to do philosophy, with how to think critically? Levinas writes, "Ethical language, which phenomenology resorts to in order to mark its own interruption, does not come from an ethical intervention laid out over descriptions. It is the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowing. No language other than ethics could be equal to the paradox which phenomenological description enters in when, starting with the disclosure, the appearing of a neighbor, it reads it in its trace, which orders the face according to a diachrony which cannot be synchronized in representation. A description that at the beginning knows only being and beyond being turns into ethical language" (*OTB* 193 n.35). Perhaps being concerned with ethical theory and moral philosophy at the heart of one's thinking might mean to defer the systematicity of the discourses on ethical theory and moral philosophy in order to inquire into the limits of these discourses and into how these limits precondition and structure the kinds of theories that can emerge. Perhaps then it

is important not to read Levinas' intervention all too quickly as a theory of ethics, but instead carefully trace its account of subject formation in order to open the field for an inquiry into its implications for an ethical theory.

Levinas' concern is whether starting with the self-present subject and consciousness does not entail already a foreclosure on the fundamental and inaugurative relation to the other that precedes the subject in any possible selfhood. Similar to the account offered by psychoanalysis, there is no consciousness for Levinas in and for itself; the subject arises always already traversed by the other. But a major difference between psychoanalysis and the Levinasian account of subject formation is the understanding of the primary impressionability and passivity of the subject. While psychoanalysis considers the drives as a primary and ineradicable active openness towards the world, for Levinas there is a passivity that is even prior to and more passive than the passivity that is opposed to activity.[104] This passivity is the mode in which the subject is called by the other, enjoined as burdened with ultimate responsibility for the other, for that which it cannot know, answerable for everything and everyone. This responsibility for the other is not founded on consciousness, but rather calls consciousness radically into question and holds it answerable in the face of the other.

The scene of subject formation in Levinas thus is the scene of an address, as it is for Althusser, but in Levinas this address is a strange address, because the demand that orchestrates the emergence of the subject is the inexorable demand "You shall not murder!" and this commandment is relayed by the *face* of the other. Thus, the address is voiced in a strangely voiceless manner, because this address is prior to consciousness and logic and thus also prior to and not open to interpretation. The subject emerges in response to the demand of the face in the mode of responsibility, in taking up and speaking the I in an offer of its presence: "Here I am." The task, then, is

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[104] Further differences between Levinas and psychoanalysis could be traced with regard to the role of desire, the unconscious, and trauma; for an interesting engagement in reading Levinas and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory together, see Simon Critchley, *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas, and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999). In his article "Responsabilité et réponse" (in *Entre séduction et inspiration: l'homme* [Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1999], 145-172), Jean Laplanche points out that the Levinasian subject is always already an adult; infancy and subject formation as implicated in and complicated by the developmental dimension seem to remain a peculiar zone of silence in Levinas.

to disentangle this scene with regard to face, the address, and the urgency of the other's demand, in order to ask how precisely the subject is formed through the response and in responsibility and to do this by looking closely at the extreme asymmetry of this situation, the overwhelming and being overwhelmed, to then ask what understanding of responsibility materializes here and what this nonnegotiable obligation means for the question of freedom and agency.

It is easy to suspect Levinas' version of the primary ethical encounter as yielding a normative version of self-sacrifice or a prohibition on self-defense in the face of an aggressor. But perhaps it is precisely the rush to normative injunctions and straightforward deductions of moral conduct that is interrupted by Levinas' thinking, and a horizon for the dawning of a difficult freedom becomes opened.

4.1 The Face and Substitution

At the heart of the scene that Levinas offers as that for subject formation lies the responsibility for the other that springs from a proximity to and sensibility of being affected and enjoined by the other's vulnerability and mortality. This enjoining encounter with the other is the immediacy of the face that issues the command "You shall not kill" as being "the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me" (*EN* 104). The face is the ultimate exposure of helplessness and destitution and, in the encounter with the face, the death of the other figures as that which I cannot let happen. At the same time, this possibility of the other's death is precisely "in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other" (*EN* 104). Hence, the relation to the face emerges here as disorientingly ambiguous. While it is the face that relays the inescapable impossibility to silence the demand of the other, the face also registers as an instigation to abandon and murder the other. There is the responsibility for the other, the impossibility to just pass by the other, the impossibility not to answer the cry for help, but at the same time this does not mean that the course of things is predetermined; the impossible remains always possible. The possibility that one will

pass by, that one will remain silent, remains real. While the other's demand cannot be silenced, the other's life remains precarious; the other can be killed.

The other's death is not only a possibility, but also a temptation: "[t]he other is the only being I can want to kill. I can want to" (*EN* 6). I can want to murder the other, but it turns out that the actualization of this desire is the precise moment when the other has not been grasped: "[T]he other has escaped ... In killing, I can certainly *attain* a goal, ... but then I have grasped the other in the opening of being in general, as an element of the world in which I stand. I have seen him on the horizon, I have not looked straight at him. I have not looked him in the face" (*EN* 9-10). Whereas I can want to kill the other, in doing so I will have evaded the face; the other will have been rendered into a faceless object. All that I achieve then is to carry out a violent act, but I will still have not been able to obliterate the other as the face that prohibits me to murder.

The ambiguity at the heart of the relation to the other here is that the face delivering the prohibition to kill also makes it possible for me to wish to get rid of the other completely—and, even more so, this face *incites* me, instills a desire in me, to rid myself of the other. So it is not merely that there remains the possibility that one might not respond to the other adequately, that one might forget and neglect the other, but with the encounter of the face, Levinas delimits the scene of the awakening I as one of the call for both ultimate responsibility and the temptation to murder. But how is it that the injunction not to kill works to tempt me to pass by, to kill and silence the other, whether from neglect or through a more overtly violent act? What is this weakness and helplessness of the face that it incites me to murder? What is this call for responsibility that it tempts me to annihilate the other who delivers this call? The temptation to let the other die, to abandon the other, is implicated in and instigated by the inescapable demand for responsibility. But neither the temptation nor the vastness of the responsibility for the other is alleviated in the account Levinas offers, thus capturing at the heart of subject formation the struggle between the call of the other and temptation to murder the other. This means that the awakening to the face of the other is constitutively an awakening as being conflicted, and if the temptation is issued by the face itself, then there is not only no subject but also no responsibility that could be pure and uncompromised. Hence, if one wanted to purify theorizing

subject formation of this conflict, one would simultaneously eradicate the very condition of the subject's awakening and attending to the call of the other.

This demand from the other institutes the priority of the other in subject formation precisely because the other's demand overwhelms and enjoins before one could even be overwhelmed. Being addressed and enjoined are constitutive for subjectivity; hence, there is no time for the subject when nor place for the subject where there is no responsibility, no having not been approached by the other: "The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a 'prior to every memory,' an 'ulterior to every accomplishment,' from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence" (*OTB* 10). The responsibility for the other is not a responsibility that I could have chosen, to which I could have agreed; the other overwhelms me, and the I cannot even remember being overwhelmed and enjoined. The responsibility is without limit, which means that it is precisely not open to negotiation. I find myself in this situation and cannot remember how I got there. So, strictly speaking, the scene of the encounter with the other precedes consciousness. This then means that consciousness can only belatedly and never adequately reconstruct and grasp this scene that conditioned its own possibility. And if I cannot remember and if the face is not only the prohibition to kill but also the incitement to kill, then I cannot know whether I have not already yielded to this temptation to neglect the other. Hence, my responsibility radically exceeds my ability to account for myself and to consciously assume this responsibility, because I have become responsible for the other's death before there was even an I that could have accepted or refused this responsibility and before there was an I that could have acted mindfully.

But this "before," this "prior to every memory," denotes a strange temporality, because this scene of enjoinment as the "non-present par excellence" is not a non-presence in the sense of a past that once was present and now is no longer present. It is a past that has never been present, but, as such, it also has never been past and is never past. Levinas speaks of a diachrony par excellence, which means that this "past" is not one that could be remembered, recollected, and re-presented in memory. A past that could be remembered would mean that consciousness could master this memory and return to itself that which always already happened—namely, the dispossession by the other. But at the same time, it is not as if we are here reaching the point of origin of

the subject, because it is precisely the *anarchical*, the nonoriginal, past of the subject. So this non-presence is not only impossible to remember and synchronize in memory, but this non-presence, while not being present and having never been present, is precisely *not absent*. It signifies that which cannot be surpassed and continues to interrupt the present. The non-present as that which cannot possibly be assimilated into the presence of a temporal continuum is that which interrupts this continuum. In other words, the encounter with the other, the address by the face, is the precise moment when temporality as the progression of a present breaks down. The address has always already happened, and any response is coming irrecoverably too late.

The problem we are facing, then, is that the other's demand of my presence is unlimited, both unlimited with regard to its beginning as well as with regard to what is demanded of me. The other demands everything of me, my full attention; there is no room for negotiation, for my plans, for the inconvenience of the other's call, not even for taking interest in my own survival. Because of the irrecoverability of this diachrony, the reaction of the subject—the answer to the summon of the face— necessarily "misses a present which is already past of itself" (*OTB* 88) and it befalls the subject: "My presence does not respond to the extreme urgency of the assignation. I am accused of having delayed" (*OTB* 88-9). I am accused of a non-action—I have delayed, I have not been there for the other, I am too late—yet this passivity is not a passivity of a willful and voluntary letting happen. I have delayed because to respond I had to be addressed, but my response had been necessary even prior to being addressed. So the address in the scene of the encounter figures not only as a demand but necessarily also figures as an accusation, because the responsibility is older than the subject itself and cannot be suspended.

This accusation, then, is a strange accusation, because I am accused of something that I did not will, and even more so that I *could not* will. So the subject emerges only under the burden of a responsibility to which it cannot ever answer adequately.[105] Responsibility thus is radically severed from imputability on the basis of conscious and voluntary action. If the severing of responsibility from the assumability of the

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[105] Responsibility here is thus quite different from the Kantian paradigm in which my obligation, the *Sollen*, implies and presupposes my capacity to fulfill the obligation, the *Können*. In Levinas, responsibility

accusation does not mean that the subject is absolved from the accusation and its responsibility, then we have to wonder whether and in what ways this scene of accusation is different from the scene Nietzsche and Freud offered describing the formation of the I as orchestrated by the attachment to and internalization of guilt. While it is not hard to read Levinas' account of subject formation as a kind of moral masochism, the question is whether Levinas might not take us beyond precisely these cycles of moral masochism, to show us that responsibility and answerability are somehow different from internalized guilt owing to the inassumability of the accusation. The accusation remains exterior and cannot be internalized, but it continues to disrupt the subject in its being.

The accusation remains exterior precisely because I cannot assume responsibility in the sense of being able to know and fully stand in for my actions. This accusation reaches beyond that for which I could possibly assume responsibility in the sense of standing in by offering a coherent and reliable account of them. This situation, in which there is responsibility despite my radical inability to be responsible, seems irresolvable, but perhaps it is precisely this irresolvability that presents us with the breakdown of the narcissistic chains of moral masochism. In this scene where I must assume this responsibility without being fully able to do so, I respond despite of my inability in the face of the accusation. But in that moment of the response to the accusation, what is at issue—from my perspective—is not primarily me and my guilt; instead, what is at issue is the other and the enormous urgency of the other's call awakening me to the fear for the other's death. This fear troubles me to the extreme: the other might be dead—and here, and only in the back of this fear for the other, I come to be disturbed about my inability to know what violence I might have already inflicted, even if only by coming too late. Perhaps Levinas takes us beyond the narcissism of moral masochism precisely because in this being touched by the other, the question of my own moral quality does not occur to me, not because I *know* that it *ought* not occur to me, but rather because it *does* not occur to me; the fear for the other troubles me beyond being even capable of thinking about how my fear might be a compromised exercise of exonerating myself.

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as my obligation to the other is radically constituted through my *Nicht-Können*, my irremediable capacity to

Precisely because the accusation is an accusation before which my ability to assume responsibility fails, this accusation is both an election and an impossibility to decline. This inescapability of being summoned to responsibility institutes, in Levinas' terms, "subjectivity [as] being hostage" (*OTB* 127). (A question that is hard to defer at this point is what this terminology of violence means for subject formation and ethics. If, as Levinas claims, ontology cannot be thought in terms other than ethical and if the "ethical terminology" is that of being persecuted, being taken hostage, and suffering, then the question what this means for an ethics of nonviolence becomes inexorable—inexorable and strangely violent itself. How are we to answer? Are we to answer? How to answer without foreclosing on the limits beyond which Levinas attempts to push, without passing by too early, without yielding to the temptation to close the book before the last page? How are we to respond *responsibly* as we have turned that last page? What does it mean to theorize in the face of the thought of Levinas?) Although the I is hostage to the face, this is a strange coercion, because the subject is being taken hostage by the expression of the other's suffering. Subjectivity as being hostage is enjoined not by greater physical force, but by being ruptured and interrupted, by being wounded by the other's suffering that demands a response and at the same time that signifies the impossibility of an adequate response and that even incites violence. In my encounter with the face, the other is "given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty. It is as though I were responsible for his mortality, and guilty for surviving" (*OTB* 91). So consciousness emerges as an insufficient, faulty consciousness—bad conscience (*mauvaise conscience)*—because in the face of the other's suffering, my mere existence attests to my belatedness and to my possibly having taken the other's place.[106] Yet this guilt is a

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fully assume and fulfill this obligation.

[106] Bad conscience in Levinas has interesting resonances with both Nietzsche and Althusser insofar as this bad conscience is also a faulty consciousness and bound up with a peculiar innocent guilt as well as a guilty innocence. Nietzsche, Althusser, as well as Levinas offer us accounts of a primary openness to accusation that appears as constitutive for subject formation. It would be important, however, to attend carefully to the differences between these accounts in how this bad conscience is brought about as well as in what role bad conscience performs in the argument. While in Nietzsche and Althusser there seems to be an underlying critique of that in whose service bad conscience is brought about, in Levinas that which overwhelms and brings about the faulty consciousness and bad conscience ends up being identified with the good. Furthermore, it would be crucial to inquire into the differences between the ways of theorizing that the three thinkers perform. Nietzsche deploys the technique of genealogy, Althusser works with and labors on a Marxist framework, and Levinas is engaging with as well as reworking phenomenology.

peculiar kind of guilt, for, as Levinas writes, "it is as though," indicating that somehow I am responsible and guilty, but not quite. I am precisely not guilty in the sense that the guilt could be attributed to an "I," because there is no self-conscious subject who could account for these deeds. Yet this does not mean that the subject emerges in innocence and is thus released from the burden of this responsibility. Quite the contrary. But this impossibility to slip away is a singling out and an identification that opens the possibility of a subject as an individual without reinstituting the individual as a self-sufficient and sovereign individual. The priority of being affected and troubled by the other constitutes an openness towards and dependency on the other that is not simply the negation of independence, because being traversed and wounded by the subject is so fundamental that it cannot possibly be recuperated. Hence, this co-constitutive openness and dependence on being addressed by the other cannot be left behind like clothes that the subject has outgrown. Because the subject is continuously implicated in the scene of the address, the subject's openness towards the other neither depends on nor turns into a "natural benevolence or divine 'instinct'" (*OTB* 124) or "some love or tendency to sacrifice" (*OTB* 124). The encounter with the other and the ultimate responsibility under which the subject finds itself institute the subject as emerging in a mode of pure passivity, *durée*, pure duration, non-action, "as being-without-insistence, as being-on-tiptoe, as being without daring to be" (*EN* 143).

This passivity is irreversible and irrecoverable; it is a sensibility distinct from the passivity of receptivity, as Levinas contends, because the passivity of cognitive receptivity is immediately turned around into the activity of spontaneous grasping. But the encounter with the other is of another quality insofar as it affects and overwhelms me beyond my ability to grasp, understand, and respond adequately. Hence, "ultimate passivity" is a strange kind of sensibility or openness: I am open, but I am not expecting the demand of the other[107]; I am not awaiting the call, I don't want this call, but I cannot but be susceptible to it. This sensibility figures as a passivity whereby the subject is being overwhelmed and interrupted by the other in such a way

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[107] In his article "Hostipitality" in *Acts of Religion* (ed. Gil Anidjar [New York: Routledge, 2002]), Jacques Derrida argues that hospitality is hospitality only when the other is not expected, when not only the expected is welcomed, but precisely the unexpected, the one not invited: "If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality" (362).

that the response to the call of the other becomes a *for the other* that resists appropriation and sublation into a *for itself* of the subject. How, then, is this response tied to the passivity of the encounter? What kind of response is this, and how are we to understand a passivity that resists turning into the passivity that is the activity of receptivity? This passivity is, as Levinas carefully and forcefully emphasizes, the passivity of suffering: "In suffering, sensibility is a vulnerability, more passive than receptivity; an encounter more passive than experience" (*EN* 92). The passivity here seems not to turn into receptivity or activity, because it is an undergoing that is the exhaustion of vulnerability. Perhaps one could understand this as a being pained that constitutes a sensibility that resists yielding sense. The question "what does suffering mean?" that one might be tempted to ask here then exposes precisely in what way suffering is extreme passivity and beyond the grasp of receptivity, insofar as the question "what does it mean?" asks for making sense of that which disrupts sense making and remains inassimilable to all attempts of making sense.[108] Ascribing sense to this suffering is that which is impossible; suffering is an undergoing that does not make sense and that remains useless. This undergoing is useless, without returns for the subject; this suffering is for nothing—for nothing that I willed and for nothing that I could get out of it—it is for nothing, it is gratis.

But in what ways is it that this extreme passivity breaks open without celebrating the gratuity and uselessness of this suffering? In what ways is this unlimited responsibility, the accusation that is election, the suffering that is ultimate gratuity precisely not the sign of an ethics of self-sacrifice that glorifies self-abnegation? My suffering is not my suffering in the sense of suffering for my own sake; my suffering is inflicted by the pain over the other's suffering, is a result of my vulnerability to the nudity and destitution of the face. And in the face of the other's call to me, my

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[108] This does not mean that one does not have to engage with and attempt to understand, trace, and perhaps even make sense of sufferings past and present in the name of opening a future where these sufferings will not have to be repeated. But it will be necessary to ask how such attempts are to attend to the necessary betrayal that they themselves perform. One could suggest that the primary locus of Butler's inquiry into ethics in her texts is her wrestling with an ethics of writing. In that sense, her engagement with ethics is performative, performing a certain kind of ethics of critique in order to open the horizon concerning which we might come to ask the question of ethics, of how ethics might come to figure, of what violence and nonviolence might mean and how they operate. Butler's texts demand these questions, as they refuse to offer quick answers and instead challenge readers. See also Sara Salih, "Judith Butler and the Ethics of 'Difficulty'" *Critical Quarterly* 45:3 (2003) 42-51.

suffering is inseparably bound to "the unjustifiable character of suffering in the other, the outrage it would be for me to justify my neighbor's suffering" (*EN* 98). The limits that all attempts of theodicy and anthropodicy meet here are striking: The suffering of the other is unjustifiable, and all attempts to explain or justify are outrageous. The face thus does not only deliver the prohibition to murder and to abandon the other, but also the prohibition to respond by attempting to make sense of the other's suffering. This might be the point where responsibility emerges as a deferral of judgment, because any response in the form of judgment would mean an ascription of meaning to the other's suffering and would mean distancing oneself from being traversed by the other's destitution.[109] The epiphany of the other's face splits me open and calls me not to foreclose on this sensibility that is my impressionability and vulnerability. Thus, ultimate passivity as pure duration in the face of the other emerges as patience, which is a holding out with the other. This patience becomes the offer of my presence in the answer "Here I am"—a presence that hardly dares to be, as it is the response for, in, and out of fear of the other's death.

The fear for the other's death is my fear not as fear for myself, but it becomes *my* fear as fear for the other and of the anguish of having already left the other and of being tempted to leave the other alone in her solitude. While one fears one's own death and finitude, death has no meaning primordially as one's *own* death: "[B]efore the death of the other, my neighbour, death the mysterious appears to me, in any case, as the bringing about of an aloneness towards which I cannot be indifferent. It awakens me to the Other" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 161). Death only comes to mean something for me through the encounter with the other, the other who can actually and really die, the other whom I always already have deserted, betrayed, and

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[109] In the *Adorno Lectures,* Butler wonders about a distancing that might be at the core of moral judgment: "The scene of moral judgement, when it is the judgement of persons that is at issue, is invariably one which establishes a clear moral distance between the one who judges, and the one who is judged" (*AL* 59). Butler nevertheless suggests that a certain ethical comportment might emerge through the suspension—not through the obliteration, but the suspension—of judgment: "It turns out that it may be that only through an experience of the Other under conditions of suspended judgement that we finally do become capable of an ethical reflection on the humanity of the Other, even when that humanity has turned against itself. And though I am certainly not arguing that we ought never to make judgements—they are necessary for political and personal life alike: I make them, and I will—I think that it would be important, in rethinking the terms of the culture of ethics, to remember that not all ethical relations are reducible to acts of judgement. The capacity to make and justify moral judgements does not exhaust the sphere of ethics, of either ethical obligation or ethical relationality" (*AL* 60).

murdered.[110] Therefore, the other's precariousness that summons the subject in the encounter with the face renders the response not only urgent, but in a certain sense inexorably belated as well. In the face of the impossibility of recovering the belatedness, in the face of the impossibility of ultimate responsibility, it is the precariousness and urgency of the other's call that necessitates but also enables the "Here I am." The fear for the other that traverses the subject through and through is the moment of breakage of the subject as self-sufficient, constituting the subject as shattered and enjoined by the other. But this enchainment to the extreme as a moment of extreme incapacity, as a moment of rupture, is the very moment when a new kind of freedom breaks open. The subject awakes to this freedom in "ethical awakening and vigilance in that affective turbulence" (*EN* 146). This turbulence is not only the turbulence of not being able to know the violence that one's existing has already inflicted on others, but the call for my presence, for my non-indifference, still instills in me the temptation to wish for the death of the other. It remains possible and—outrageously—tempting to foreclose on one's openness and vulnerability towards the other.

It is intriguing how hard it is not to foreclose on Levinas' text, to pass it by, to close the book, perhaps as one reaches the chapter on substitution in *Otherwise Than Being*. There he lays out how individuation happens through the untransferrable substitution for the other, because "under the accusation by everyone, the responsibility for everyone goes to the point of substitution" (*OTB* 112). This substitution for the other is precisely not an activity of self-sacrifice, because this unlimited responsibility for everyone, under which the subject finds itself, renders impossible any return to itself. The subject is taken hostage by the other in the moment when by the other and for the other come to coincide. The response "Here I am" cannot be the I for itself, but figures as the breaking point where the I is solely for the other's sake. This for-the-other is for the other to the extreme, "the self is absolved of itself" (*OTB* 115), but in and through that which it did not will itself and which it cannot possibly assume. The I emerging in unlimited passivity is the inversion of

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[110] Interestingly, Laplanche also introduces death as encountered not through relation to one's own death, but precisely through the death of the other, as he points out in his interview with Cathy Caruth: "I would say

identity as self-coincidence and self-possession under the responsibility for each and every other, and Levinas asks, "What can it be but a substitution of me for the others?" (*OTB* 114).

Unlimited responsibility—what can it be but a substitution of me for the others? Levinas takes us even further: "We have to speak here of expiation as uniting identity and alterity" (*OTB* 118). This expiation is by no means an achievement of the I; this expiation is prior to will, choice, and achievement. Unlimited responsibility, under accusation by everyone, substitution, by the other as for the other, expiation. This is not an argumentative transition; perhaps this is the moment when the argument breaks down, perhaps the very limit of making sense of Levinas and within Levinas. But what does that mean? Does that render the very question "what does that mean?" nefarious? Perhaps there is a point in every attempt to theorize subject formation where theorizing reaches its limit, its point of breakage, where the question of what that means is transformed into the question of how we are to attend to this specific point of breakage. How are we then to deal with the specific points of breakage in Levinas' account? How can we attend to them without patching them up all too quickly? Perhaps it is something different to think about a limit as a point of breakage rather than a limitation, because a limit reached in thinking as limited thought does not necessarily need to interrupt thinking, but can also mean an unbroken progression by reversal. A point of breakage might in fact be precisely the moment when thinking, when theoretical progression, is interrupted and exhausted by that which it attempts and wishes to grasp but cannot grasp and yet must wish and attempt to grasp. Perhaps this interruption is the moment when thought is being affected in a way that opens it up time and again towards that which escapes it, renewing thinking's life in vigilance and desire for what remains inassumably other to it. But this does not mean that all interruptions are alike or that there could be a universal absolute that figures as an invariant in escaping all theoretical attempts alike. Rather, there are important differences with regard to what ways different theories meet their particular limits and specific points of breakage and how these interruptions perform in and through these

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that the question of the enigma of death is brought to the subject by the other. That is, it is the other's death that raises the question of death" (¶93).

theories. With regard to Levinas, the question, then, is how to attend to the specific fissure that occurs in the face of the precariousness of the other.[111]

The demand that the face delivers, which constitutes my responsibility, is the demand not to abandon the other. The demand is the demand of my presence, my presence for the other without limits. In this substitution, the other is not assumed, the other's suffering is not assimilated or justified, and my suffering for the other cannot claim to alleviate the suffering—it might, but that is beyond my control. Equally, the subject's guilt is not alleviated, the responsibility not suspended, the I not exonerated; the for-the-other is not an exercise of self-expiation, but neither is it a self-effacement that is ultimate alienation. Substitution as the extreme moment of being for the other in self-dispossession is the moment when individuality emerges as irrecoverable irreplaceability. Through my being summoned, it dawns upon me that no one else can substitute him- or herself for me, but that I have to substitute myself for all. Quietly through the other, the subject is engendered: "I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche" (*OTB* 114).

As incessant displacement of the self, the psyche figures as "the form of a peculiar dephasing, a loosening up or unclamping of identity: the same is prevented from coinciding with itself, at odds, torn up from its rest, between sleep and insomnia, panting, shivering" (*OTB* 68). In other words, the psyche is the "malady of identity" (*OTB* 69) keeping the subject from being at home anywhere in the world. Summoned by the other, the subject is irreversibly "expelled from his place and has only himself to himself, has nothing in the world on which to rest his head" (*OTB* 121), where having "only himself to himself" with regard to being expelled also means the impossibility of being at home with oneself. The paradox of this expellation by interpellation is that the insomnia Levinas discusses is not only inescapable because of the height—the ultimate eminence—of the face, but this inescapability from the

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[111] What does it mean that still Levinas *speaks* this breakdown of the subject, consciousness, logic, and principle to us, delivers it, especially while this breakdown in the face of the other is what seems to be the point where all attempts to interpret or even make an argument for or against reach a limit? This limit is that posited by the suffering of the other and its unjustifiable character. What does it then mean if one asks the question, "Why *substitution*? What is this *substitution*?" Does that mean that one can ask the question, that it is a logically possible question, but then what ... ? Is it already engaged in the making sense of suffering? Are there other ways to conceive of this responsibility than in these terms of substitution and expiation?

demand and impossibility of taking the other's charge is precisely what constitutes the subject's identity and the subject's selfhood.

The I as an insomniac self hence emerges from this process of substitution that is not a willed and decided act of self-sacrifice, but something that comes upon the subject in its being taken hostage and being obsessed by the other. This obsession singles the subject out not only in its irreplaceability, but also in an irreversible asymmetry with respect to the addressing other: "[T]he subject affected by the other cannot think that the affection is reciprocal, for he is still obsessed with the very obsession he could exercise over him that obsesses him" (*OTB* 84). The fear of being the other's obsession and hence causing the other's death allows obsession to operate as non-reciprocity, because this reciprocity remains unthinkable for the subject. The subject is thus formed in an irremediably asymmetrical relation to the other, which might in fact be an arelationship, because this asymmetry cannot be reflectively grasped and acknowledged. But while the asymmetry cannot be relieved and transformed into mutuality, the question remains open whether it is possible to conceive of a reciprocity of asymmetries through which the limits of reciprocity can be acknowledged. Within the dyadic relation, the I, however, cannot reflect on the possibility of the reciprocity of appearing as a face, because the I and consciousness are only awakening to the call of the other that is unlimited and not open to reflection and deliberation.

Here we return to the subject as awakening and emerging broken-hearted and terrified about its own belatedness and the violence that it might have already inflicted.[112] But this does not mean that self-sacrifice could be a place of refuge for the

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[112] Perhaps there is room for the subject and thinking the subject opening up by putting into play the I awakening in a state of being terrified, panting, and shivering, and the I awakening in a state of being broken-hearted. For a version that grants priority to the other in understanding subject formation through broken-heartedness, see Jean-Luc Nancy's essay "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community* (trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney [Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1991], 82-109). Another question pertaining to the death of the other is how mourning the death of an other would look in the Levinasian account. It seems that Levinas' philosophy is a cry for life. What does the reality of the loss of an other mean with regard to the dyadic relationship? In *God, Death, and Time* (trans. Bettina Bergo [Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000]), Levinas does not address the question of loss and mourning, but offers an intriguing gesture where the regular syntax breaks down: "Someone who dies: a face that becomes a masque" (12). If death means the transition from appearing as a face into the stillness of a masque, then one could think about how an other might be sentenced to "death within life" by petrifying and arresting the face of another into a masque. Butler offers other interesting inroads into the problematics of death, loss, and mourning by engaging with Walter Benjamin in her afterword "Afterword: After Loss, What

subject. There is no possibility for me to be absolved from the accusation under which I come into being. Even in attending to the other, responding cannot be an exercise of self-exoneration; I cannot *choose* to substitute and sacrifice myself, as in that very choice I would return my actions to myself. My choice to sacrifice myself in response to the other's demand would still be an act of self-preservation, self-preservation carried *ad absurdum* to the extreme where I assert myself in the very act of extinguishing myself, slipping away from the demand of the other, from the demand of my *presence*.[113]

This "presence"—which remains ultimately impossible—is, to the extent that it is possible and called into its possibility, an uneasy life, as the consciousness emerges as a faulty, bad conscience from which I come to suffer. But in encountering the face of the other and responding, my own plans are troubled beyond my concerns for myself: "An appeal of the face of my fellow man, which, in its ethical urgency, postpones or cancels the obligations the 'summoned *I*' has towards itself and in which the concern for the death of the other can be more important to the *I* than its concern as an *I* for itself" (*EN* 227). This means that there might be obligations that I have towards myself, but the urgency of the other's death is the vanishing point of my obligation towards myself. Hence, there remains a concern for oneself, even an obligation that one has towards oneself to take care of oneself, but the other's call takes ultimate precedence over these obligations. It even seems as if here the irrefusable interruption and intervention of the other turns out to operate as a liberation. The other's call frees me from my obligations towards myself and my obsession and worries over myself.[114]

Then?" of the edited volume *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian [Berkeley: U of California P, 2003], 467-473).

[113] There are two aspects in play throughout Levinas' text. On the one hand, we are encountering a phenomenological connotation of an "I cannot" that describes my own inability that delimits the field of my possibilities—I simply cannot and will not slip away. On the other hand, we are encountering an ethical connotation of an "I cannot" that leaves open my ability to do that which I am coming to understand as an *ethical* impossibility. The question arising then is how precisely the phenomenological aspect and the ethical aspect are intertwined. It appears as if the phenomenological aspect arises to be addressed by drawing and developing a certain persuasive force that is a kind of normative force that does not prescribe but instead seduces.

[114] As Simon Critchley points out, the conscious subject emerges through the "traumatic logic of substitution" (189), which correlates with the Freudian understanding of trauma as "an economic concept [that] refers to a massive cathexis of external stimulus that breaches the protective shield of the perceptual-consciousness system or ego" (191). Precisely this breaching can be discovered in the encounter with the face by which the subject is made to respond by being responsible for a suffering that he himself or she herself did not will and cannot remember. By this *Nachträglichkeit* that is a being too late of consciousness,

The other's demand is a liberation, an absolution, but not a self-abnegation and even less a self-abnegation for the abnegation's sake. The giving oneself up is not really a decision to *give oneself,* not a deliberate act that depends on finding justifications, not really a choice. The giving oneself is a given, a difficult gift, *Gabe*, that becomes a task, *Aufgabe*.

The for-the-other does not return to the I, and thus it is impossible to delimit or exemplify the act in which that self-suspension congeals. As Levinas carefully emphasizes, the for-the-other "can only be discreetly. It cannot give itself out as an example, or be narrated in an edifying discourse. It cannot, without becoming perverted, be made into a preachment" (*EN* 99). The concrete situations and actions through which the for-the-other appears are not by virtue of their uniqueness safeguarded from being generalized, narrativized, and advocated as a model or standard. Preaching, prescribing concrete conduct, is not impossible per se, but in a way it is always a perversion of that which it attempts to prescribe and stipulate. As soon as concrete action is turned into an example and ascribed normative force—even if only with regard to its context—the act remains precisely not limited to its specific and unique context; the exemplary is an example only insofar as it is not absolutely unique, but instead stands in to demonstrate and illustrate an instance of a generality, implying not only interchangeability but also repeatability. As repeatable with regard to the more general framework, the example travels beyond the specific context and operates in the service of a generalization. Being relayed as exemplary and repeatable, the concrete, the discreet, is invested with a normative voice and force, which implies that one could and ought to follow the example. Yet whatever is rendered as an example is that which cannot be generalized, because the concreteness of the

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the conscious subject is fabricated as "the effect of an affect, and this affect is the trauma" (Critchley 186). The question then is how precisely the being affected is understood and how the emerging subject is constituted with regard to its own relationship to the traumatic being affected. A psychoanalytic reading suggests a cathexis to the external stimulus on the part of the subject; in the Levinasian account, however, such a cathexis cannot register because it would mean an investment of the subject that would undercut the ultimate passivity of the subject undergoing the substitution for the other. But perhaps a way to reread psychoanalysis would be to ask whether there might not be a kind of cathexis of the breach in Levinas as well, perhaps a cathexis, however, that cannot register properly in the psychoanalytic framework. Perhaps what from the perspective of a psychoanalytic position appears as a failure in the Levinasian account is that moment when Levinas offers a way to unhinge the closed circuit of psychoanalysis' narcissism.

response, of the "Here I am," cannot be mastered, claimed, and prescribed in a conscious act.

This does not mean that normative discourse is to be condemned and abolished, but the question instead must be how this discourse can acknowledge this perversion as the scenario of its coming into existence.[115] In other words, if it is the case that normative discourse meets its inherent limit in the very responsibility in whose name it is put forth, then the question is: How can normative discourse bear witness to its necessarily being a perversion of that which it attempts to safeguard? The conclusion to draw from Levinas, then, is not that we ought not have norms and laws—not only does Levinas' thought not allow for such straightforward normative deductions, but because we are implicated into a world where there is always more than one other, we even *must* craft, create, and enforce norms and laws, and certainly not every normative discourse needs to be preachment. But if normative discourse operates and has to operate through generalization, what are the ways in which it can attend to its necessarily compromising the uniqueness of the other?

4.2 The Third and Asymmetries

The necessity to have normative and judicative discourse and to compromise the unique relation to the other derives from the situation that the relation with the other is always already troubled by human sociality insofar as there is always more than one other: "If he [the other] were my only interlocutor, I would have nothing but obligations! But I don't live in a world in which there is but one single 'first comer'; there is always the third party in the world: he or she is also my other, my fellow" (*EN* 104). Levinas refers to this other other as "the third," indicating that the dyadic relation remains prior to the triadic situation and is not surpassed and left behind by the situation of sociality. Every other is and remains an other to me and demands my presence, but because this call is not a single call, but a plurality, the further demand

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[115] It might be interesting to consider this scene of perversion in terms of the necessary travesty and parody that emerges here as condition of the possibility of rights and norms.

for justice emerges: "[J]ustice, here, takes precedence over the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other. I must judge, where before I was to assume responsibilities. Here is the birth of the theoretical; here the concern for justice is born, which is the basis of the theoretical. But it is always starting out from the Face" (*EN* 104). I *must* judge: in the face of the unique and incomparable, an obligation arises to reflect on the demands of the multiple others, to compare, weigh, and judge them, but the demand of each individual other is not transformed or alleviated by this obligation. Theoretical deliberation emerges only in the name of justice and is always bound to the primary and ultimate responsibility for each and every other. Thus, objectivity, intentionality, and consciousness neither precede nor supersede the responsibility for the other, because objectivity, intentionality, and consciousness emerge as a response only due to the subject being summoned and overwhelmed by the other, which is always already a multitude of others. Because of the *ultimate* responsibility for *each and every* other, the I cannot single-handedly choose one over the other, cannot abandon one other in the face of an other other. The obligation to judge materializes as an imperative that takes the form of "You must compare because it is incomparable!"[116] Deliberation and theoretical discourse arise and even *must* arise, thus—while remaining the primary and constitutive moment—the encounter with the face cannot figure as a call to blind sacrifice for the other.

It is impossible for me to disregard what one other does to another other precisely because of the responsibility prior to all judgment that denies favoring one other over the other. But the obligation to judge, Levinas clarifies, "does not mean the taking account of possible wrongs I may have suffered at the hands of one or the other, and denying my dis-interestedness; it means not ignoring the suffering of the other, who falls to my responsibility" (*EN* 195).[117] Thus, while I am obligated to consider what one person does to another, and while this might mean that others will be called to assess what has been done to me, the latter is not my task and not in my hands. The entry of the third here comes not to mean for me that in thinking about and weighing

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[116] With regard to the question of what practical philosophy Levinas' approach to subject formation yields, it might be important to consider the precise ways in which this obligation to compare that remains bound to the ultimate responsibility for the other is different from the consequentialist accounts of ethical and moral deliberation.

what others do to each other, I am to enter my own suffering into that equation. This seems troubling, since one could ask whether there is not a necessity of self-preservation at the heart of being able to deliberate and act. *Must* I not also take care of myself in order to attend to others? Does one not have duties regarding oneself that arise out of one's responsibility for the others, because not taking into account one's own survival might mean to abandon others? Levinas at this point is merely saying that the obligation to judge does not imply that it would be up to me to set my suffering over against the others' suffering. He seems to argue against a position claiming that first my existence must be secured and then I can attend to others, that my self-preservation justifiably takes precedence over the lives of others. Does this mean that I *cannot*, that I *will* not, fear for my life in the face of the others' lives at risk? Does this mean that I *cannot* and *will not* avoid risking everything? Is Levinas suggesting that even with the entry of the third, even with the rise of consciousness, there is no place for taking care of oneself?

The underlying question here is that of the relation between the dyad and the triad. The asymmetry that characterizes the dyadic relationship—where the face of an other summons me—is irreversible and cannot be converted, developed, or sublated into a reciprocity because of the inassumability of the other. Because of the limitlessness of the demand of the other within the dyad, there is no room for self-preservation. But this relation is complicated by the entry of the third, and in return "[t]he relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at" (*OTB* 158). What precisely is this "correction"? What does it do to the face? What is the I becoming? A few paragraphs later in *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas writes, "Synchronization is the act of consciousness, which ... institutes the original locus of justice, a terrain common to me and the others where I am counted among them, that is, where subjectivity is a citizen with all the duties and rights measured and measurable which the equilibrated ego involves, or equilibrating itself by the concourse of duties and the concurrence of rights" (*OTB* 160). Synchronization—the act of comparison—is the birth of my activity in response to the demand for justice, where I weigh and judge the demands

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[117] Also see in *Otherwise Than Being*: "Consciousness is born as the presence of a third party. It is in the

of the many others by which I find myself addressed. But this weighing now establishes common ground not only between the others, but I am also "counted among them." Thus, differing from the dyadic relation through which the I emerged as displaced and expelled from its place, in the multitudinous relation the others and I share a common ground. This ground is the locus of justice, perhaps even the original locus of justice, which seems to imply that originally—or nonoriginally, anarchically—there is not justice, but only responsibility, responsibility before justice. Only with the entry of the third and the demand for justice, which occasions the birth of consciousness, do I become one of the others, and being a citizen of justice's terrain means to have measured and measurable duties and rights. It seems as if, with this act of consciousness that is enabled and demanded by the entry and presence of the third, the dimension of sociality emerges as a momentum by which the unlimited responsibility and the I undergo an opening that does not undo or cancel the responsibility, but opens it towards sustainability. But how precisely does then the priority of the dyadic relation continue to structure the triadic or multitudinous relation?

Levinas informs us that under the auspices of the third, "[m]y lot is important. But it is still out of my responsibility that my salvation has meaning, despite the danger in which it puts this responsibility, which it may encompass and swallow up" (*OTB* 161). My lot, my plight, does matter, but to whom precisely does it matter? My lot seems to come to matter not only possibly to others, but also to me, since within the relation to the third, the I turns out as "equilibrating itself by the concourse of duties and the concurrence of rights" (*OTB* 160). "Equilibrating itself," the I seems to become self-reflexive and self-reflective with regard to its own fate. But still my salvation, my survival, that comes to mind here is a perilous activity, because my emergent interest in myself is always in danger of obliterating my responsibility towards the other.[118] So I end up being able to attend to the other only in a way that will never be able to fully assume the responsibility that is demanded of me by the face. I have to compare, judge, and act, I am to decide for one against another, I am to

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measure that it proceeds from it that it is still disinterestedness" (*OTB* 160).

[118] What precisely is this relation, then, between this responsibility and the deliberative balancing in the name of justice? And what does that mean for the relation between the I and the other, the I and the others?

consider what it takes for me to sustain my life, but I can never know how much violence I have already inflicted by my mere presence.

Thus, any conscious act that I consider and carry out remains traversed and troubled by the diachrony of my anarchically being conditioned by the touch of the other. Hence, action and freedom are possible only in the form of an unfaithful leap, a necessary betrayal of the primordial responsibility, an inexorable failing of the other who demands my presence. As such, my acting—which also cannot escape being an act of affirming my own being by virtue of implying my continuing to live through acting, and for and towards others—as such, my acting is irrecoverably my final irresponsibility. This irresponsibility is irrecoverable, because the address by the face of the other, the dyadic relation that enjoins me, conditions the I and is not overcome with the entry of the third. In other words, my ability to act and know, my coming to say and stand as "I," is irrecuperably breached by a double failure: I am always already betraying the other, and I cannot ever come to assume the responsibility for this failure; I cannot even fully know and stand in for what I have done. But while I cannot fully know the violence that I may have inflicted, I remain responsible and hence irremediably in need for forgiveness.[119] And as one becomes conscious of this unknowingness and dependence on forgiveness, Butler offers that it is precisely this knowledge and acknowledgment of the limits of knowing and acting that might "constitute a disposition of humility, and of generosity, since I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot fully know, what I could not have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves" (*AL* 56).

Obligation hence reemerges in Butler's account, similar to Levinas', precisely from the region of the unwilled. The implications for thinking about ethical theory, if we cannot but fail to act fully responsibly, are hence not that there is no ethical theory possible. Instead, the question is precisely the failure to become fully responsible that

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[119] The situation is peculiar, because there is no one who could absolve the subject; there is no primary goodness of the subject that could be restored and that for which one needs to be forgiven that then remains that which is unforgivable. We are always already in need for forgiveness, the being remains unforgivable, but, as the radically unforgivable, it is that which enables forgiving. If forgiveness is a giving of that which is undeserved, then one cannot forgive that which is forgivable, but only the unforgivable. See Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (trans. Mark Douglas and Michael Hughes [London: Routledge, 2001]).

then opens the possibility for ethical life and an inquiry into morality. In an interesting gesture in a discussion on "Politics, Power, and Ethics," Butler inquires into ethics as emerging through the failure to become fully self-transparent and self-aware regarding one's actions and obligations.[120] Ethics under the auspices of failure "would center perhaps on a certain willingness to acknowledge the limits of acknowledgment itself, that when we claim to know and present ourselves, we will fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are, and that we cannot expect anything different from others. This involves, perhaps paradoxically, both a persisting in one's being (Spinoza) and a certain humility, or a recognition that persistence requires humility, and that humility, when offered to others, becomes generosity" (¶10).[121] The interesting question here with regard to Levinas is the role of persistence in one's being, perhaps the necessary persistence in one's being, acknowledging limits of the livability of the for-the-other. While there might not be a primordial right to one's own survival that one can invoke as a precondition for and championing of one's extending to others and risking oneself for the other, there might be a strange obligation shyly arising that will continuously be troubled by the anarchical relation that the subject always already has to compromise. But because there are always more others who demand one's presence—others present, past, and future—there is no ground for justifying or even prescribing how one is to offer one's presence.

My presence, my "here I am," is by necessity an unfaithful leap, and although the originary obligation is incontestable, it is precisely because of this incontestability that there is no way that this obligation with regard to the lives of the others could yield positive prescriptions. My response remains bound by the primary obligation, but as this obligation fails to determine and prescribe, it demands and enables the unfaithful

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[120] Judith Butler, "Politics, Power, and Ethics: A Discussion between Judith Butler and William Connolly," *Theory and Event* 4.2 [2000]:
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v004/4.2butler.html>. Butler inquires into the nexus between the limits of acknowledgment and ethics more extensively in her 2002 Adorno Lectures, *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt*.

[121] As Butler clarifies in the *Adorno Lectures*, "To acknowledge one's own opacity or that of another does not transform opacity into transparency. To know the limits of acknowledgment is a self-limiting act and, as a result, to experience the limits of knowing itself. This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility, and of generosity, since I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot fully know, what I could not have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves" (*AL* 56). This is an intriguing gesture with regard to the question

leap into an unknowable and uninsurable freedom. This leap is also a leap of another kind, a leap not really considered by Levinas, because a response is a response from one perspective, but to the one at whom the response is directed, the response is an address. The question thus is what happens to the asymmetry between the other and the subject when we consider that the I can appear as a face as well. This is not the question whether or not the I can appear to itself as face, but what happens when the I comes to conceive of the possibility that it might appear as a face and thus address an other. At issue here is not whether or not the dyadic asymmetry can be assuaged and mediated into a reciprocity; this is impossible, because the dyadic relation as an anarchical ethical relation is precisely not an experience, not an event with a certain duration within time and space, but rather it is because of this relation that there can be time and space for consciousnesses. Still, I cannot simply *know* or even *experience* my appearing as a face, appearing as an other in the dyadic encounter, and we cannot even recollect and thematize this dyadic encounter, as if we could then proceed from there. Yet the dyadic encounter as anarchic continuously troubles and traverses the possibility and scene of our experienced encounters. So the task is twofold, insofar as the anarchic character of the asymmetry in the encounter with the face needs to be attended to as well as the question of what it might mean to conceive of a reciprocity of asymmetries.[122]

For Levinas, this asymmetry between me and the other seems to be so extreme that I cannot really think what my substitution might mean for her: "[A]t the outset I hardly care what the other is with respect to me, that is his own business; for me, he is above all the one I am responsible for" (*EN* 105). Responsibility does not depend on feelings of sympathy or on having a prior history with the other and knowing the other's story; the responsibility delivered by the face is prior to the logos and to the transmission of information and is thus anarchical, without principle, without beginning, and thus unconditional. But Levinas opens some space here, since the I *hardly* cares *at the outset*. So while the I is enjoined by the other no matter what, the I

"what normative ethics are in view?" because an *obligation* emerges here, but this obligation is constitutively bound to the need for forgiveness.

[122] In his *Proper Names,* Levinas engages with Martin Buber's dialogic philosophy and offers his criticism of the reciprocity presupposed in the I-Thou relationship. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 17-39.

seems to be *not entirely* indifferent to what the other is to her. How does that "what the other is with respect to me" figure in this scene of the encounter with the other? What does it mean for the encounter that this is the other's "business"? Certainly I cannot waive my responsibility for the other in the name of a claim to my first being an other to others. I cannot say, "Hey, I'm your other, you are ultimately responsible for me," because in so doing I would demand that the other substitute for me in my responsibility, and I would immediately distance myself from being addressed. But still this claim—while impossible to begin with and impossible to ever fully justify by my demanding it—might be precisely what I will invoke under certain conditions; it might be necessary to stake this claim, but this does not change that I do not really have a right to invoke it, because I have no control over, no access to, my possible being an other to the other. I cannot be without the address by the other; there is no I without this address, without the demand that troubles and traverses me, the demand that incites me to make it go away, the demand that still remains that which is my life. The question we are to think about is not really whether or not I can regard myself as an other or whether I can derive rights from my being an other to others. But what does it mean, in Levinas' *Otherwise Than Being*, when upon the entry of the third, the I tells us: "I am approached as an other by the others, that is, 'for myself.' 'Thanks to God' I am another for the others" (*OTB* 158)? The I here seems to become cognizant that that he or she is an other to others, and thus the I apparently comes to be able to conjecture that he or she as well can appear as a face to others.

Even so, at issue is not the question of my rights as an other to others, but what it might mean that I deliver and perhaps have to deliver the call for unlimited responsibility to the other to whom I respond. At issue is what the implications for interaction are, considering that, in interacting, everyone might be an other to the other person. What does it mean that the person with whom I interact has to experience her- or himself summoned by encountering me, which leads to a situation in which the other person is taken hostage by me and then comes to substitute her- or himself for me? What does it mean to come to interact with an other who, owing to my own proximity to her or him as a face, "forgets reciprocity, as in love that does not expect to be shared" (*OTB* 82), and cannot other than feel the unlimited responsibility for me? While it is not a question of my interpretative or psychological competence to attain insights about how the other may experience me, the question here is what

happens to the face, the other who in the encounter appeared so very faceless. The "Here I am" as a response in a scene of address is not a soliloquy of the subject and thus it is also not only a "Here I am *for this other,*" but as a response, it inaugurates the face-to-face relationship, and hence the response turns out to be an address in return. So in the scene of the encounter in conjunction with the response as another address calls on a you, this you is precisely not a readily knowable or an intimate other, because the response is not founded on any prior relationship or history with the other. The response thus dares the you in the "Here I am for you—you, whomever you may be." What does it mean to you that I enter into a *face-to-face* relationship with you?

Face to face—as it dawns on me that I can possibly be a face to you, in my answer "Here I am," I come to wonder: Who are you? Who am I to you? What does it mean that I appear as an other to you and that you, as your own "I," awaken to being enjoined by me? What does it mean that my face might take you hostage? Without my will, I must impose on you, I will impose on you, and I can never fully know and control what I am doing to you when I respond. And if the face is not only that which commands you not to murder but also instills and incites aggressivity, then something in me—without my willing all this—comes to command and tempt you in the very moment that I am urged out of myself by offering and imposing my presence in the "Here I am." Even if I did not want to take advantage of my being an other, even if I would want for you to emerge as yourself gently, without being taken hostage, even so, if there is a face-to-face materializing, if then I do appear as face, then—in the Levinasian account—I cannot but impose on you. One could probably say that the desire not to impose in return is returning the subject to the circuits of narcissism, because the subject still is bound up in the fantasy that one could be the one undergoing and taking the suffering upon oneself while ensuring that one oneself would not depend on the other's enduring one's own impinging as a face. The circuits of narcissism thus cannot be not broken by reflecting or theorizing narcissistic attachments out of existence, but they can only be interrupted through extending oneself to the other, acting in the face of narcissism, neither directly negating nor directly affirming the narcissistic dimension. No act is secure from my returning it to myself in the service of my preoccupation with myself and by my agonizing over my narcissism and my imposition on the other. But in the moment of action, the unfaithful

leap might be the very moment of interruption that remains inassimilable and that in that moment suspends the tight twists and turns of narcissism. The moment of "my" action, my response, is precisely the moment of my dispossession, which I cannot master or control.

So it turns out as impossible to control and eliminate my overwhelming and imposing on the other, and ironically I overwhelm precisely in the moment that I respond to the other who is demanding my presence. My response is not only too late, but it also inaugurates another asymmetry, and these asymmetries cannot be neutralized by each other. While it seems as if the irresolvable play of asymmetries as core to subject formation forecloses any ethical life together, we might indeed, perhaps strangely, see an unhinging of the circuits of narcissism and violence becoming possible here. The fact that we cannot fully know what we have done to each other and even do to each other as we attempt to act responsibly does not mean that we have now obliterated all responsibility and all differences. Rather, if we are always already given over to each other in asymmetrical relations and can never become fully responsible, then the question of ethics and responding responsibly will not only be one of "who is my other?" and will not only be "who are you?" but it will be the question of responding in a way that keeps these questions alive: "In a sense, the ethical stance consists in asking the question, 'who are you?' and continuing to ask the question without any expectation of a full or final answer" (*AL* 57). It will not be enough to simply acknowledge that we are bound in asymmetrical relations and that every response will be an address in return. Rather, the question will be how to attend to these asymmetries and respond in a manner that will enable rather than foreclose responses.

In these terms, Levinas offers us good news about this difficult relation in which we are being addressed and ourselves responding and addressing: "To be in relation with the other face to face—is to be unable to kill. This is also the situation of discourse" (*EN* 10). The face-to-face relation, which becomes discourse, turns out as the situation of peace. But with Butler—who has been throughout her writings persistently raising and interrogating the question of intelligibility—we are asked to attend carefully to this situation of discourse. For discourse to be possible, for there to be an interplay of responses, there still must be an address, an encounter with a face, and the question that returns here is: Who can appear as a face? What are the

conditions under which someone can appear as a face? While it is beyond my control to allow or hinder someone to appear as a face, and while the enjoining power of the face is not adjudicated and graded and scaled by social norms, appearing as a face is not beyond social norms of intelligibility. Levinas does not completely obliterate the social and historical contingencies of the concrete situations of our encountering an other; he admits that representation, interpretation, and comparison are necessary and are even called for: "An objectivity born of justice and founded on justice, and thus required by the *for-the-other*, which, in the alterity of the face, commands the *I*. This is the call to re-presentation that ceaselessly covers over the nakedness of the face, giving it content and composure in a world" (*EN* 167). Levinas clearly distinguishes between the demand of the other that engenders and commands the I and that is not open to interpretation and the requirement to interpret and compare the incomparable others precisely because each other commands the I uncompromisingly. Precisely because of the unlimited responsibility for *each* and *every* other, I cannot disregard the sociohistorical particularities, the historically contingent constellations of power relations, of violence inflicted on one other by another other. I do not mean to relativize this scene here, but it seems to me that the question of social and historical particularities is not only at issue with regard to representation in order to compare and judge, but already with regard to what "nakedness" can come to affect as nakedness.

When Levinas considers signification and intelligibility, the primary signification takes place through the encounter of the face and the injunction of the "You shall not commit murder," and this "first intelligible is not a concept, but an intelligence whose inviolable exteriority the face states in uttering the 'you shall not commit murder'" (*TI* 216).[123] This intelligence, which simply befalls the selfsame subject and summons it, is understood by Levinas as extreme proximity that has an immediacy that comes before all discursive interaction, calling the self radically into question. This seems to imply that there could be a kind of immediacy that is beyond signification, outside and prior to the social, outside and prior to being structured by concepts and rules that signify and render interaction meaningful. This is not to say that discourse in return—

or precisely these rules and concepts—would have a pre-social existence, because they themselves are dependent on their application and appropriation apart from which they have no life and through which they come into existence. By recourse to Hegel, one can emphasize here with Levinas with regard to being and becoming that "[t]he concept being, purged of all the content which determines it, is ... not distinguishable from pure nothingness" (*OTB* 175). This argument can be extended beyond the matter of being, but the other aspect of the Hegelian argument at play here is that while there cannot be a pure concept without content, there also cannot be pure particularity, because simply to encounter particularity and to be able to perceive this encounter as an encounter, recourse to general concepts is already implied. Absolutely immediate individuality purged of all structure and concepts is just as indistinguishable from nothingness as pure generality. There cannot be an intelligence that functions "beyond signification," a voice that summons before all discourse without deploying signifying concepts and rules.

The face "produces the commencement of intelligibility ... which commands unconditionally" (*TI* 201), and the validity of the command is not open to interpretation. But even though it is the encounter with the face that produces intelligibility and enables the impossible, namely, intelligibility and negotiation of intelligibility, we still need to ask what the conditions are under which whose countenance becomes visible. Which voices pass unheard? Which faces could never become faces? Certainly it is not at my disposal to determine whom to hear and which face to recognize; this is the undergoing the appearance of the face that befalls and enjoins the I unexpectedly, whether I want it or not. The face is encountered without prior notice or preparation and with such suddenness and indeed such inescapability that it is like lightning that lights up the pitch-black night and by which one suddenly one gets a glimpse of a scene one could not possibly infer. This glimpse, once had, is inescapable insofar as one cannot decide to make oneself simply forget what one has seen. In its might and terrifying brightness, the lightning that is the encountering of the face breaches one's thinking and feeling so that it appears to one as utter immediacy, as unconditioned, and demands precisely this unconditionality. I am not

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[123] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh:

only overwhelmed by the face, but I did not determine the conditions under which I could and would be overwhelmed. Nevertheless, these conditions are not beyond the social and historical contingencies, but the intelligibility and possibility of the encounter with the face is precisely dependent on the social categories and norms that adjudicate intelligibility. This is, as Butler points out, the situation of the I being dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence (see *AL* 20, 28, 36ff.). If appearing as a face depends on social norms of intelligibility, then these norms are precisely that by which the dyad is always already interrupted and by which it is opened towards the social conditions of existence.

Hence it is not merely that we need to inquire into the role of social and cultural assumptions regarding the interpretations of the demand for responsibility, but we also need to attend to the role the social plays by orchestrating the intelligibility of the command "You shall not commit murder" by preempting certain voices. Nevertheless, the originary summons to responsibility remains also unintelligible if it does not somehow then have consequences regarding the content of this responsibility, regarding how this responsibility then translates into action or the refusal to act. The concrete meaning that the for-the-other comes to take on is always an interpretation and has to be determined and negotiated. The act, the unfaithful leap that concretizes the "Here I am," depends on daring a translation and concretization of what this responsibility might come to mean. The originary demand is only belatedly intelligible through a speculative and interpretative attempt, and thus the demand as it arrives is in itself always already traversed by social and historical contingencies. The question that reemerges here with urgency, then, is this: what delimits the possibilities of who and what can appear as a face? How precisely does "the social" orchestrate responsibilities and thus the emergence of the I? Attempting an inquiry here means— as Butler argues and performs—that the I has to become a social critic.

Duquesne UP, 1969).

5 Subject Formation, Materiality, Discursiveness, and Resistance

Two of the prevalent concerns about poststructuralist thought—and, more specifically, Butler's thinking about subject formation and especially about the gendered and sexed body—have been the role of materiality and the possibility of ethical and political agency, the capability of persons to produce meaningful and effective change in political and social life. The worry is that if indeed bodies are not to have a material life apart from and prior to being performatively shaped and inscribed by social and cultural norms and practices, then bodies in their very material fragility and vulnerability are no more than "just linguistic effects." Bodies no longer matter; only norms and practices that signify are interesting, all our being—so a well-rehearsed quick allegation—is nothing but illusion, all kinds of violence are rendered indistinguishable and injuries and lives nothing but virtual realities. All the more, so the criticism goes, politically and ethically significant action is no longer possible, because all action is unpredictable and always already continuous with that which it attempts to interrupt. Action only becomes a random joyful "postmodern" subversion and transgression, caught forever in the norms and practices it seeks to oppose, and all the more as there are no agents who could act critically anyway—despite the examples Butler invokes to show how resignification works.

This is, admittedly, a stylized account of criticism leveled against Butler and against poststructuralist thought more generally.[124] But insofar as this criticism points towards the problematic of how to think and theorize in the face of vulnerability and the reality of violence, I believe it is worthwhile to hold present the issues raised. Obviously there is something deeply disturbing, at least to some, in the troubling of

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[124] Regarding what it means to parody an intellectual position, Butler remarks in her essay "Merely Cultural" (*Social Text* 52/52 [1997] 265-277) that "parody is to enter into a relationship of both desire and ambivalence" (266), and she expounds further: "Parody requires a certain ability to identify, approximate, and draw near; it engages an intimacy with the position it appropriates that troubles the voice, the bearing, the performativity of the subject such that the audience or the reader does not quite know where it is you stand, whether you have gone over to the other side, whether you remain on your side, whether you can rehearse that other position without falling prey to it in the midst of the performance" (266).

the clear distinction between two sexes, between material bodily reality and immaterial psychic reality. And the interesting question is why is it so troubling and seemingly dangerous when we can no longer distinguish neatly between sexes, between bodies, psyches, and the social norms and practices in which they are implicated? What precisely does it mean to understand subject formation as a "process of materialization"?

I would like to back up a bit and think about the very term subject *formation*; the account Butler offers is not a developmental account of the subject, an account of series of events that we all undergo and from which in the end we emerge maturely, finally, as subjects. In other words, Butler is not theorizing the pre-history of the subject. Or is she? The subject emerges as a process, as the process and effect of its own formation, but that does not mean that it is reducible to the terms and conditions of its formation. Neither does the subject as subject formation mean that the subject ever fully transcends its formation. And, insofar as narrating the subject's own coming into existence is indeed nothing but an account of its own pre-history, any account of subject formation is the story of its own origins that continuously traverses and *is* the subject, while at the same time that is the very moment that remains irrecoverably unknowable to the subject itself. This unknowability is precisely what sustains subject *formation* as continuous emergence. This formation is, as materialization is, a corporeal process that works through sedimentation over time, the repetition of bodily effects creating a history of this body, of this person that is and is not this body. It is not as if what and who I have become in the way I respond, act, comport myself then collapses, in the very moment that I am no longer called a certain way, that I no longer move in a particular community with its particular norms and rituals, its conscious and unconscious "hang-ups." Subjects are not reducible to the scenes of their formations, but they are also not becoming without these scenes, which are always already social. Their sociality is not only a sociality working through there always being others involved, other persons that have been in my life before there was an I that could claim this life as its own. But this sociality is also always a sociality operating through norms, rules, and ritualized practices. And if we accept that this latter aspect is part of the sociality of subject formation, then we need to ask how precisely these norms come to have material, bodily effects. What does it mean that the body, the subject as bodily, emerges through language, through norms, rules, signifying practices? Butler

emphasizes that to claim that the body is available only in and through language does not mean that it is fully reducible to language: "For my purposes, I think, it must be possible to claim that the body is not known or identifiable apart from the linguistic coordinates that establish the boundaries of the body *without* thereby claiming that the body is nothing other than the language by which it is known" ("How Can I Deny" 256).[125] So the question becomes what this knowability or intelligibility means that delimits the life of the body, outside of which life is possible only as impossibility, as a kind of "social death"—a kind of life between life and death that is not simply a figure of theory, but something that is felt daily by actual persons, that has been at the core throughout all of Butler's work.

One of the main thinkers Butler engages on this question of emerging as living a kind of social death is Michel Foucault and his inquiry into the formation of the subject as a bodily one with regard to the societal mechanisms of shaping that body. Butler's inquiry into Foucault is stimulated by the intention to unveil the limits of subject formation against which one has always already run up. This concern of hers is shown paradigmatically in the quote from Foucault's "Rituals of Exclusion" that Butler chooses to preface her essay on Freud and Foucault in *Psychic Life of Power*; in this quote, Foucault states his interest in that "system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it" and in his effort "to make the cultural unconscious apparent" (Foucault in *PL* 83). These two aspects motivate an inquiry into *assujetissement,* the process of becoming a subject while or through undergoing subjection. Autonomy, then, is a figure that can only be assumed insofar as radical dependency on the subjecting and subjectivating power is acknowledged. As individual subjects, we come only to be individualized and intelligible to ourselves and others according to the discursive regulations that render us individuals. But what does that mean with regard to our bodies? Certainly discourses do not operate like a divine performative. It is not as if discourses (somehow becoming unified agents of their own) speak and designate a subject and suddenly bodies appear out of nothing— "let there be a perfect American citizen subject!"—and suddenly a person fitting the

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[125] Judith Butler, "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?" *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001) 254-273.

description appears out of nothing. Rather, discourses seek out, target, regulate, define, delimit, shape, and work over our existences from before our births until after our deaths. What kind of material productivity does discourse have, then? What does this mean for subject formation as bodily? Is there such thing as a "bare life," a life that is unrecognized, but still not quite dead? What kind of life would that be, what is its domain, what are the conditions of its production? And if discourses are not only ultimately pervasive, but also that upon which our lives are contingent, does this mean that there is no part in the subject that is not ruled and governed by discourse?

In order to grapple with these questions, Butler puts into play Foucault and psychoanalysis. Foucault himself criticized psychoanalysis in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* for its blindness to the fact that rather than emerging as a liberator of the repressed, especially of sexually repressed individuals, and setting sex free, psychoanalysis continues to produce these individuals and their sexuality as repressed in order to be liberatory. In other words, as Foucault explains, the problem is that psychoanalysis as a technique relies on the inscription of its own theoretical premises as truthful discourse: psychoanalysis is "a theory of the essential interrelatedness of the law and desire, and a technique for relieving the effects of the taboo where its rigor makes it pathogenic" (*HS* 129). The ruse Foucault is explicating here is a double movement of psychoanalytic discourse that first essentializes the effect of the taboo, namely, the sex-desire, and then psychoanalytic discourse institutes itself as an effect of the workings of that taboo, thereby concealing the taboo's constitutive reliance on being exerted. So it is not that psychoanalysis, according to Foucault, cannot understand the workings of the interdiction, the taboo, to have effects and even to be productive, but psychoanalysis cannot conceive of the subject that the interdiction takes as its effect and psychoanalytic discourse as an accomplice of the interdiction. In other words, psychoanalysis' blindness is a blindness to a double inversion and perversion. Firstly, Foucault's psychoanalysis is unable to understand sexuality as a mere effect of the interdiction; rather, it has to institute sexuality as preceding the interdiction and then the interdiction arrives on the scene and represses sexuality. Secondly, psychoanalytic discourse cannot understand the workings of this interdiction and thus the production of sexuality as an effect of its own discourse; rather, it has to understand psychoanalysis as having emerged in opposition to the taboo and the repression of sexuality. So psychoanalysis—understood with Foucault

as resistance against the norms and prohibitions regulating sexuality—is not radically breaking with that which it opposes, because it receives its own power only from the power of that which it attempts to resist.

So Foucault emphasizes that it is impossible to ask simply for a liberation and emancipation in the sense of transgression of and revolt against that which restricts and constricts. And Butler underscores this position in her argument that in any political struggle one becomes entangled with that which one strives to oppose. On the one hand, transgression reinvests and reinstitutes that which is being transgressed and, on the other hand, that which is supposed to be liberated cannot exist independently from that which regulates it. But this does not mean that resistance is impossible. Foucault states in *History of Sexuality* that "there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary" (*HS* 96). For him, there is no unified position from which to disrupt, because there is no outside to power from which to attack it, since power does produce that which it seeks to control. Yet it is precisely this productive aspect of power that invests every one of its effects with power that exceeds the control by that exercise of power that conditioned the emergence of the particular effect. In other words, power continuously and irresistibly generates possibilities for disruption, and there is necessarily "a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (*HS* 96). The question then that arises and that will accompany us is this: how can there be change and what kind of change does this proliferation of possibilities of resistances effect? While Butler continues in her work to engage with Foucault and finds his thinking about subject formation and resistance useful, she also, unlike Foucault, considers psychoanalysis as significant for thinking about these very issues, insofar as psychoanalysis offers an approach to inquiring into exclusion and foreclosure as constitutive and as producing a remainder that cannot be fully recovered, is unconscious, but nevertheless not static or inactive. With regard to Foucault's criticism of psychoanalysis, Butler does precisely not read psychoanalysis as a technique to redeem the modern subject, but she deploys psychoanalysis as a critical tool, namely, as a methodology of reading symptomatically. This means that psychoanalysis functions as a framework through which it becomes possible to reread relations that present themselves as direct cause-effect relations in a way that asks what has to be excluded, disavowed, rendered unconscious in order for this particular constellation to appear. In psychoanalysis,

then, there is, as in Foucault, an account of subjection to and according to norms and ideals that produces not only bodies and subjects according to these norms and ideals, but also its own resistances. The question is how then precisely the psychoanalytic and the Foucaultian account differ and how they relate to each other.

Holding in play this question of the relation between Foucault and psychoanalysis, Butler performs this intersection herself through her inquiry into how subjects emerge in subjection formation as bodily subjects and how the body is produced as a site of social regulation and inscription and as a site of continuous contestation in the process of subject formation. The body as the site of social regulation is inherently intertwined with that of the nexus between materialization and discursiveness and the question of how discursive productivity operates in terms of what kinds of exclusions, resistances, excesses they produce. To inquire into the nexus between materialization and discursiveness, then, means to ask not only how bodies and subjects are produced as effects, but also how these effects are reproducing the interwinement of material and immaterial. But this does not mean that the discursiveness of subject formation is reducible to language in the narrow sense; rather, we might come to understand the embodiment of norms as the materiality of the logic of practice, as performed by Pierre Bourdieu. The question that reemerges with the embodiment of norms is the question of resistance and how the relation between the subjectivating norms and power and the possibility of resistance is figured in Butler's work and what that means for thinking about agency. In other words, the task will be to examine the limits of signification to trace breakage points in the process of the crafting the corporeal subject by its subjection and stylization according to social and psychic norms. In relation to the notion of resistance, the concept of agency then emerges as a different concept than resistance regarding the nexus between subject formation and ethics, insofar as theorizing agency asks what acting and resisting come to mean for the subject from the subject's perspective as a kind of relating to itself.

5.1 Signification, Discursive Enactment, and the Production of the Body

Discursive formation of the subject and of the body is not to be thought as bodies "caused" or "determined" by discourse; rather, Butler explains, by pointing to the Foucaultian prisoner in *Discipline and Punish*, "subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place" (*PL* 84). The claim here is indeed that there is no individual subject that precedes its formation through subjection. Butler is reminding us here of Foucault's point that there is no existence apart from discourse and power, and she elucidates that this does not mean that discourses are arbitrarily and randomly giving birth to subjects; rather, it is precisely the restriction and subjection that achieve the definition and formation, the norm that shapes, coerces, and seduces to life. In short, one could say, there is no prisoner without the prison. Butler rereads Foucault through psychoanalytic vocabulary, understanding the prison's norms and regulations as norms and regulations constituting and stipulating a normative ideal for the prisoner. The rendering of the prisoner as a coherent and individual prisoner by subjecting his body to these norms and regulations then can be figured as the prisoner's assumption of that ideal. Butler then reads this identity with the ideal as a psychic identity, which Foucault calls the "soul" of the prisoner. The soul, therefore, is figured as a captivating effect, "as a kind of prison, which provides the exterior form or regulatory principle of the prisoner's body" (*PL* 85). If the soul is said to act upon the body as its material and formative principle, it seems as if this then means that there must be a soul and a body that independently preexist each other's entanglement with each other, insofar as the soul seems to come into a body and then imprisons and activates that body.

Butler approaches this problem by offering a psychoanalytic critique of Foucault. In psychoanalytic theory, generally the "psyche" includes the notion of the unconscious, whereas the "subject" is that in which the notion of the unconscious is excluded (see *PL* 206 n.4). The inner psychic ideal that corresponds to the subject's ideal is the ego-ideal that is the normative institution that the super-ego acquires as a

yardstick to evaluate and judge the ego. In Lacan's theoretical framework, this ideal is "the 'position' of the subject within the symbolic, the norm that installs the subject within language and hence within available schemes of cultural intelligibility" (*PL* 86). That which necessarily remains impossible to be installed within these schemes of intelligibility because it resists such signification is that which remains in the unconscious. The remainder ensures that the subject that emerges is not a dead subject, a subject that necessarily ends in irreversible self-annihilation. To coincide fully with the symbolic would mean that there is no resource for the movement of self-differentiation, no resource for self-reflexivity, and hence that no self-transcendence would be possible.

The psyche established as including the unconscious is what resists the normative demands of regulation, and Foucault's soul that fully and unilaterally imprisons the body would denote a process of full signification within the symbolic and a cancellation of the remainder of the unconscious, an elimination of that which cannot be signified. The soul in such a paradigm is completely externalized and, as a regulatory power, opposes the body, which takes the form of utter interiority. Butler doubts this account of the soul's rendering the body an interiority in the sense of its being a "malleable surface for the unilateral effects of disciplinary power" (*PL* 86-87). The criticism she proposes to offer, however, does not mean that she is ready to accept uncritically the presupposition that the unconscious poses an agency of necessary resistance. Her reading of Foucault and psychoanalysis rather inquires into "the problem of locating or accounting for resistance" (*PL* 87) by asking what has to remain unconscious in psychoanalytical theory for its account of the subject and its fabrication—psychic, social, and material—to work. It seems that she suggests that postulating the unconscious as a necessary remainder that resists the normative demands of signification is in itself an unconscious within psychoanalysis or, as cited in the epigraph to Butler's chapter on Freud and Foucault in *Psychic Life of Power*, a particular "system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it." In other words, the critique offered by Butler has a double dimension: while she recasts any concrete understanding of subject formation, she also exposes the "subjectivity" and life of all theorizing insofar as that as well can emerge only by taking up a certain position and disavowing others, which then register as that "theory's unconscious." The impossibility to ever fully know raises the question of theorizing's own opacity in

its productivity and the question what this then means for how to theorize responsibly. How do we attend to the necessary disavowal? How are we distinguishing between different forms of exclusions, violence, and foreclosure? What does it mean to ask for these distinctions? What is the epistemic status and function of both the question and the distinctions? How, then, do we think resistance and reshaping of the norms that limit and animate subject formation?

Butler's question to Foucault is how precisely it is possible to think resistance to normalization and her question to psychoanalysis is in how far a necessary resistance, as guaranteed by the function of the unconscious, deserves to be named resistance. The question in both cases is how precisely resistance figures not only with regard to how norms and regulations perform, but also how the relation among resistance, the body, and the psyche figures. If normalization always produces an excess, never fully works, insofar as it needs to reproduce the nonnormal as its own subject, then normalization is not only productive insofar as it produces the normalized, but also insofar as it is unable not to produce a remainder that escapes normalization. If this remainder that cannot be produced as normalized is constitutive of every act of normalization, then this remainder occurs within the act and its subject. The normalized subject that is produced, then, is not produced without also producing a remainder, and this remainder cannot ever be fully expelled from the subject, but is equally external and internal to the subject. As the subject emerges through its subjection to rules and norms, it is never fully fitting, never fully reducible to these rules and norms, but constantly undone from within. Normalization's production of the remainder thereby renders visible the limitation of exactly that claim to universal normalization. This does not yet mean that the kind of resistance encountered here already forces the power that subjects and subjectivates to reevaluate and rework its demands. In other words, what we are encountering here is merely a phenomenon of slippage, of involuntary and necessary resistance, but to be resistance in the full ethical and political sense of the concept, the notions of intention and therefore also of direction and specification of a reformulation of the regulating norms have to be present. And apart from the questions of the possibility of direction and intention, the question is how to mobilize the necessary instability of normalization, how and in what ways the politicization of the necessary failure of normalization becomes possible. A further question that arises with regard to the notion of the unconscious is

whether the unconscious can indeed be understood as being less under the control of a certain "normative injunction" and "less structured by the power relations that pervade cultural signifiers" (*PL* 88) insofar as the unconscious is produced as power works upon the subject. If the unconscious is indeed structured by the power relations of the social, it then is clear that it is impossible to herald it as it is, as a locus and resource for effective resistance, as if it were outside and opposed to social power structures.

To continue her critique of the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious as necessary resistance, Butler first turns back to Foucault and his account of the relation of the soul and the body in terms of subject formation in *Discipline and Punish*.[126] Foucault establishes power as not merely fabricating a subject's limit and boundaries, but it also "pervad[ing] the interiority of that subject" (*PL* 89). Butler asks how we are to understand "interiority" in Foucault and whether there is an interior preexisting power when he proposes power as acting *on* and *in* the body. Because the soul as the imprisoning effect is radically exterior, the soul cannot be what could take the place of interiority; the soul rather seems to take the place and function of the normalizing, regulating, and thereby productive power. Interiority here seems to become "a space of pure malleability, one which is ... ready to conform to the demands of socialization" (*PL* 89). Suggesting that this interiority might even denote the body itself, Butler points to the possibility of reading the soul as the "exterior form" and the body as the "interior space." The soul's existence emerges from the body, as it is "produced around, on, within the body" (*DP* 29) under the exercise of power in the practices and rituals that are performed in the prison, but also, more generally, in all kinds of societal institutions. This functioning of power that Foucault speaks about here can be found, for example, not only in the dietary restrictions, daily schedules and routines, and architectural structures of prisons, but also in hospitals or in schools that compel bodies to perform certain tasks in specific ways, to adopt specific postures, and more generally to make bodies comply with and reinforce precisely these matrixes of regulation and normalization. These practices and routines bring about the production of the soul as "the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (*DP* 30). Foucault inverts here the Platonic

understanding of the soul as an immaterial ideality that is eternal and becomes incarnated and incarcerated in the body. For Foucault, it is instead the body that needs to be freed from the soul, rather than the soul from the body.

It is interesting that here and elsewhere when Foucault speaks about bodies getting worked over and the soul being produced within and around the body, the body emerges as never becoming fully coextensive with the principle of its subjection; instead, there seems to be something about the body that is resiliently resistant in escaping totalization while simultaneously being worked over by and participating in its own coercion. The soul emerges as the instrument through which power can form, shape, and cultivate the body; the soul, through its formative power, becomes the principle of the body's materiality. But the soul does not preexist power and is then grasped by power and turned against the body. The soul is in itself only an effect of power working on the body. The soul as exterior form is understood by Foucault as that which "inhabits him [the prisoner] and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (*DP* 30). As the instrument through which power can form, shape, and cultivate the body, the soul through its formative power becomes the principle of the body's materiality.

This kind of *assujetissement* is not merely a subjection in the sense of domination; it is not merely an exertion of power on a preexisting body that shapes the substance that has existence outside and prior to the workings of power. There is no "raw" body or materiality prior to and outside of power; power itself, in return, is not some immaterial existence for Foucault, but is power in the sense of political and social anatomies. *Assujetissement* thus is a bringing of the bodily subject into existence, since "there is no body outside of power, for the materiality of the body—indeed, materiality itself—is produced by and in direct relation to the investment of power" (*PL* 91). Materiality has no existence aside from power relations, but materiality is the investment with power that makes materiality material.

Butler fervently argues against understanding materiality as independent from power or as a substance prior to investment with power, and she refuses to accept the

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[126] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York:

body as a materiality that has fundamental and original characteristics and that then is shaped and marked by the history of subjections that form it over time. Materialization happens to the extent that matter is invested with power, or, as Butler explains, "Insofar as power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a taken-for-granted ontology, its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens" (*BTM* 34-5). In the process that installs matter as material, this materiality is also established and discursively posited as a sort of positive fact that exists apart from discourse, hence *discursively* offering this materiality as if it were a non-discursive positivity. Arguing against an understanding that retains materiality as radically other than discourse does not mean to argue for a radically idealistic view; rather, it means to maintain that it is only in language and by means of language that we have access to this materiality.

Yet bodies and materiality cannot be utterly reduced to a linguistic effect, which would mean to propose some kind of monistic linguistic idealism that proffers the unilateral production of matter through an immaterial principle. With regard to the body-psyche distinction, Butler cautions against such an idealistic monism: "[T]he materiality of the body ought not to be conceptualized as a unilateral or causal *effect* of the psyche in any sense that would reduce that materiality to the psyche or make of the psyche the monistic stuff out of which that materiality is produced and/or derived" (*BTM* 66). Understanding materiality as reducible to language as its origin and cause would, in fact, only mean to reverse the problem, insofar as instead of understanding matter and language as originally or ontologically radically distinct, matter and language would then be understood as originally and ontologically absolutely indistinguishable. But by reducing matter completely to immateriality, linguistic idealism relies as well on the purity of the opposition between materiality and immateriality. Butler attempts to rethink the relation between language and matter more radically by offering a kind of radical contamination of both language and matter. The distinction between language and matter, then, no longer holds as a solid ontological distinction; the ontological difference between signifier and signified does not precede its intelligibility, our being able to know and communicate it, but—and

Vintage, 1995).

that is the difficulty—this does not mean that all language is simply matter or all matter is nothing but language, because such a reduction to one ultimate principle and origin would again be an ontological claim, attempting to establish a secured domain of being that can be known prior to knowing it. Signification works only through establishing relations of difference; this differentiation is the horizon and condition of the possibility of intelligibility. Even as I am trying to think this relation, this differentiation and the non-differentiation, and the unintelligible, the unknowable, or that which might be prior to and irreducible to that which we can know, I am caught insofar as I am trying to understand and *know* and speak *intelligibly* about that which escapes knowing and intelligibility. If, then, I cannot know outside the workings of signification, there is always already a kind of cut that has happened and that cannot be reduced to some unified origin or principle. Signification thus is the very act by which a cut is made, a cut establishing materiality versus immateriality by establishing meaningful relations between them. Signification works by through differentiation, which allows signifiers and signifieds to become intelligible. Strictly speaking, this means that the relation precedes that which it relates. As bodies as signifieds come to be intelligible in the relation to particular signifiers, the differentiation also means that the materiality of the signifier is instantiated as distinctly different from the materiality of the signified. And this difference becomes "the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated" (*BTM* 69). Language or discourse and matter are implicated and embedded within each other while never being reducible to each other.

Thus, it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an absolute outside to discourse and, respectively, to matter as well, because that which would be instituted as absolute outside would still be produced via negation of that which then constitutes the respective inside to this outside. Butler's argument runs somewhat similar to Wittgenstein's in his *Lecture on Ethics*, in which he shows that talking about "the absolute" as such is senseless because for a sentence to make sense, it has to establish a relation, yet the absolute is that which is not relative.[127] Thus, whatever is claimed discursively as "outside discourse" is a constitutive or relative outside that includes

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[127] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review* 74.1 (1965): 3-12.

that which is excluded from the system to which the outside constitutes the outside. But because the system can only be established through such delimitations that function as exclusions, the outside still remains in the system precisely as its non-thematizable necessity. The political and ethical predicament, then, is that there is a domain of the "internally excluded," the abject other that is not only other and excluded, but also constitutive of the possibility of that which is being constituted. So if the ongoing constitution of the social operates along these lines, then a call to include what has been excluded would undo the social and lead to the production of new other exclusions. Butler therefore argues that "[insisting] that all that remains unspeakable become speakable now and in the future" figures as "the political temptation"(35).[128] This does not mean that we ought not yield to this temptation; it does mean that political struggles will involve a kind of undoing of the social life as we know it as well as the life of the subject as we have come to know it. But the predicament of the variability and reproduction of exclusions will not so easily be brought to an end, "and yet, the fact that subjects are variably excluded from the sphere of the human, the intelligible, the speakable, means precisely that we do struggle against those confining and life-denying norms" ("Agencies" 35). Just because full inclusion might not be possible to achieve, this does not mean that political action has become impossible; rather, it becomes crucial to attend to this situation and the ways in which it frames the scene for political action precisely through the limitations by which political action then is enabled.[129] The "outside" and excluded that we encounter here is, as has been argued, not an absolute outside, but rather constitutive, which is where its political and ethical trouble comes from. That

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[128] Judith Butler, "Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject," *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie (London: Verso, 2000) 30-37.

[129] On the question of a "politics of 'inclusion,'" see also Judith Butler's essay "Merely Cultural": "[F]or a politics of 'inclusion' to mean something other than the redomestication and resubordination of ... differences, it will have to develop a sense of alliance in the course of a new form of conflictual encounter" (269). And furthermore in her "The End of Sexual Difference?" (*Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka [New York: Columbia UP, 2001] 414-434), she insists: "The task, it seems, is to compel the terms of modernity to embrace those they have traditionally excluded, where the embrace does not work to domesticate and neutralize the newly avowed term; such terms should remain problematic for the existing notion of the polity, should expose the limits of its claim to universality, compel a radical rethinking of its parameters. ... If there can be a modernity without foundationalism, then it will be one in which the key terms of its operation are not fully secured in advance, one that assumes a futural form for politics that cannot be fully anticipated, a politics of hope and anxiety" (421).

exclusion establishes a relative and more so constitutive outside does not mean that there could be no absolute outside, however. Or, in Wittgenstein's terms, while it makes no sense when we speak about the absolute outside, this does not mean that such reality necessarily cannot exist.

The question of the absolute outside is not and cannot be brought to full closure, and thus a possibility for thinking about transcendence opens up precisely where language reaches its limits and is unable to offer meaningful sentences about the absolute. The paradox, according to Wittgenstein, is that even when one uses an utterance such as "I am safe *whatever* happens," what this does is create "the paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value" ("Lecture on Ethics" 9). At the same time, it makes no sense to speak about being absolutely safe regardless of what happens, because a sentence "This and that is the case" makes sense only if we can imagine that this and that is not the case. In his example of absolute safety, Wittgenstein continues to argue that it makes sense to speak about one's being safe from whooping cough because one has already suffered from it before or one's being safe inside a house because one cannot be hit by a bus. But it makes no sense to speak about being safe *regardless what happens* because if one is always safe, one is always safe. Absolute safety thus is a tautology, and hence it is impossible for us to speak meaningfully of it, since that would presuppose that one might not be safe, which cannot happen within a construct of absolute safety. Yet when we use such utterances about the absolute, which are, strictly speaking in Wittgenstein's terms, meaningless, they are still intelligible and convey meaning. The reason for this lies not in the fact that we have not yet found the correct way to utter these experiences, but because their meaninglessness is constitutive for these utterances. One runs up against the limits of discourse when trying to speak about the absolute, but one cannot get beyond discourse because that is what constitutes us, yet the possibility of experiencing the limits of discourse as limits because one strives to talk meaningfully about an experience while the language itself allows for no meaningful signification exposes the possibility of transcendence.

Butler's argument regarding the impossibility of an absolute outside to discourse, in my view, does not collide with the possibility for transcendence that is opened up precisely through the experience of the limits of discourse as outlined by Wittgenstein's argument. Her contention that an outside cannot be absolute, but is

186

always intrinsic to a system as its constitutive and disruptive necessity, does not mean that the possibility for transcendence is obliterated and completely collapsed into immanence. It merely means that no recourse to this absolute, to this wholly other—also not as a resource for resistance—is possible, because it is beyond materiality and discourse.[130] And it is necessary to continue to hold up the contention that matter cannot be radically other to language and discourse or cannot have an independent existence apart from language and discourse, because otherwise it would be impossible to utter meaningful sentences about materiality. If Butler gave up insisting on the constitutive implication of matter within discourse, then the critique that has often been raised against her—that she renders very real and material bodily pain and oppression imperceptible and impossible—would be indeed appropriate, because a sentence about such a bodily condition would not signify anything if the material condition were absolutely other than language.[131]

But even if we cannot understand the body as materiality that preexists or exists apart from discourse, we still need to ask how precisely discourse works on the body and brings about this bodily subject. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault explains that subjection does not only happen through ideology and violence, but that "there may be a 'knowledge' of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them: this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body" (26). It is the conjunction of this knowledge and this mastery that makes up the

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[130] Hauskeller's argument in *Das paradoxe Subjekt: Unterwerfung und Widerstand bei Judith Butler und Michel Foucault* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 2000) that Butler refutes the possibility of an absolute thus seems to me to be not utterly precise, especially when she contends that Butler gives up the idea of the outside as something that cannot be captured in terms and relations (Hauskeller 111). This implies that Butler's epistemological conviction would be that everything can basically be captured in terms and relations, yet such statements would themselves be claims that assert truths about the entirety of language. Butler, however, is more careful that that and avoids such propositions about the entirety of reality.

[131] See, for example, in the German debate, among others, the contribution by Barbara Duden ("Die Frau ohne Unterleib: Zu Judith Butlers Entkörperung—Ein Zeitdokument," *Feministische Studien* 2 [1993]: 24-33), who argues with reference to *Gender Trouble* that Butler's theorizing institutes a new subjectivity, namely, that of the disembodied woman. Andrea Maihofer (*Geschlecht als Existenzweise* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995]) offers the criticism that the reality of the bodily materiality is lost and dissolved into being nothing but a "surface" or "fiction." Christine Hauskeller contends in her *Das paradoxe Subjekt* that Butler's concept leaves no room for referring to "violence, exploitation or repression, which are experienced at least also as bodily alienation and overpowering" (112), so that Hauskeller can then argue for the necessity for changing an actual situation of oppression. On the question of thinking the relation between nature and culture and between matter and language see also Vicki Kirby, "When All That Is Solid Melts Into

political technology of the body that Foucault distinguishes from ideology and violence. The parallel construction seems to suggest somehow this knowledge is different from ideology and this mastery is different from violence. It appears that the knowledge would be ideological—in the sense of an abstract, disembodied ideality of concepts—if it were understood as "the science of [the body's] functioning." And this mastery is not precisely violence, because it is not simply a question of subjugating the body. It seems that both knowledge and mastery are distinct from ideology and violence precisely in their conjunction, insofar as knowledge turns out to be a kind of mastery and mastery turns out to be a kind of knowledge.

Knowledge is bound up with power—and not only because it can be applied usefully to control bodies and their functions. The intertwinement of knowledge and power also operates insofar that this mastery implies a complicity of those who are worked over by this power-knowledge nexus. It is a mastery that somehow is no longer simply external subjugation and coercion, because there is an individual created through this being worked over. There is a prisoner there, and as Foucault explains with regard to the panopticum, the panopticum works not because there is someone who is indeed always watching, but because there always could be. In fact, it is even crucial that "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (*DP* 201). It is not the actual gaze to which the prisoner is subjected, but rather the operation of subjection works through ensuring the *knowledge* of the *possibility* of the omnipresence and omniscience of this gaze. The coercive effect of this knowledge now primarily has the inmate himself as its source, rather than the guard who might be watching and thus knowing what the inmate does: "The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (*DP* 202-3). Subjection here is revealed to work because the gaze is reduplicated, in a sense; the prisoners begin to watch and

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Language: Judith Butler and the Question of Matter," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*

monitor themselves. This means that a certain knowledge is created here, but it is not a knowledge about biological functions per se; rather, it is a knowledge of the subject with regard to certain norms and rules. And, furthermore, what is interesting for the question of subject formation is that this knowledge is produced by the subject turning on himself and taking himself as an object of his knowledge. In this knowledge production, the subject emerges as a principle of its own subjection, but also by virtue of this operation, a certain interiority and individuality are created.

This individuality or self that is emerges here is of great interest to Butler, who wonders "at what expense" this formation happens and in what ways the body figures as the site and object of this expense. Butler examines Foucault's characterization of the body as an "inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (83).[132] The body becomes the materialization of events over time and the material effect of their dissolution into experience by ideas. When Butler offers that there is a "sublimation of the body in consequence of displacement and substitution" (*PL* 92), one could be tempted to ask whether this phrase does not also indicate a trace of the ghost of a materiality that comes before the works of power and seemingly lives independently from them. Reading this phrase against the background of Butler's vehement refutation of such materiality would mean that there is a two-step process going on. The first step is that the body as such is called into existence exactly by the power of displacing it and substituting it, and then the second step is the consequence of sublimation. This explanation does not quite work to dissolve the ghost of an original body, as if there could be a more authentic form of bodies, or in Foucault's idea of bodies and pleasure, some sort of original freedom. I believe what Butler asks us to do is to see both sides, both calling into existence and sublimation, both equally as an effect of the other, and to think them as coinciding in time and not as a linear development in which one follows the other, as the organization and differentiation into two steps at first suggests. The emergence of the self—that is constitutively a dissociated one—occasions and is itself

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7.4 (2002): 265-280.
[132] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 76-100.

caused by the displacement of the body and its dissolution into sublimation to some extent, and thus "the self [is] read as the body's ghostly form" (*PL* 92). This means that the body cannot be made to disappear utterly and totally, and therefore the next question is how to understand that "part of the body which is not preserved in sublimation, some part of the body which remains unsublimated" (*PL* 92).

The consequence for the formation of the subject is that it goes along with the price of a "constitutive loss" that occurs in the body, because the body is not simply the site of free construction, but occasioned through normalization. But if this exertion of power can never be perfectly effective in achieving the aspired totality and normality, if normalization always produces a remainder that slips normalization, then this is where the possibility for resistance may be found. This possibility is constitutive and structural at this point since it is the necessary effect of power. As such, initiated by the very power that it attempts to eliminate, it is the occasion of power's self-subversion. In other words, the effects of subjectivation exceed its occasion and so "undermine the teleological aims of normalization" (*PL* 93), since the subject is not produced in a single instant, but repeatedly over time. Yet this continuous emergence of the subject does not mean that it is a fully new creation time and again, but rather a renewal within and against the restrictions performed and produced by the history of the social relations and regulations orchestrates the subject's emergence. Butler emphasizes the historicity and sedimentation of norms and regulations, which implies both their changeability as well as their relative fixity. But emerging as subject is also restricted by the history of the individual subject itself. There is a kind of memory—not only conscious and accessible memory, but a host of memories, relations to past events, unconscious as well as conscious. The body as a site of inscription, the unconscious as a storage in excess, as well as conscious recollections and attachments, implicate the subject in a history of itself that it is constantly only becoming. I cannot *have* my own history, but rather my history is that by which I am constantly dispossessed, as it comes upon me as strangely as not simply someone's history, but I am to relate to it in some sense as *mine.*

This "memory," this "history," is never only my story as I might explicitly or merely somehow in the back of my actions come to tell it to myself; in fact "my" memory, "my" story, has from the beginning not only been implicated in the stories of others, but it has come upon me only through others. Through these encounters with

others and their ideas, concepts, roles, and stories about me, I come to be, though never reducible to these ideas, concepts, roles, and stories. No individual is ever reducible to her story, and yet there is nothing such as "the irreducible individual" or "the individuality of the individual" that we could claim and secure as prior to and untethered by discourse. I am not reducible to a conglomerate of identity patterns, social roles, and stories, and yet I am only through them. They, as well as my "I," are in certain ways always beyond my control; I come belatedly and uneasily to this person who has come to be me. And they are, more often than not, the identity patterns, social roles, stories, and memories that are most resilient as they are written on the body, writing the body, writing me.

So what one could call the ascription of a story is process of social inscription and is not at all an immaterial process. If we here now link up Foucault's discussion of the shaping of the prisoner and Nietzsche's contention that memory is always bodily insofar as it is sustained by pain with Butler's juxtaposing both with psychoanalysis, it becomes possible to see that the formation of the individual is a bodily process as well as a rule-governed process, social and psychic at once. The task now is to trace how these aspects are intertwined, how they enable and constitute each other. Norms do not simply work upon the body, but for norms to be effective, and thus *active*, they need to be embodied, both embodied and thus *activated* precisely by that very body upon which they are said to work.[133] Norms are constitutive for subject formation in the sense that only through rule-governed signification can the subject emerge. For the subject to emerge means for the subject to be recognized as such, which means that someone is signified and understood as subject. Intelligibility and materiality are therefore inseparably linked up. The Hegelian trope of recognition turns up again at this point, the focus now, however, on the aspect that to recognize someone as someone necessarily involves a signification process. Butler continues to hold on to this question as well as the importance of recognition. Recognition cannot simply confer materiality, but it does create a certain kind of materiality through identity. The

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[133] Christine Hauskeller argues in her *Das paradoxe Subjekt*: "Butlers Text zeigt, daß sie Materie als diskursives Produkt und damit auch als passive denkt, daß sie keine eigene Aktivität des Körpers oder anderer *Referenten* konzipiert" (111). Here it seems that Hauskeller misreads Butler insofar as she does not acknowledge that the contribution of Butler is not to assert passivity on the one side and activity on the other

problem with recognition, as well as with identity, then turns out that in this gesture of signification and designation a certain ossification happens that cannot quite grasp and fix that which it names and attempts to grasp—namely, this body, this life, this individual. But at the same time, the way that this body, this life, this individual escapes full recognition is only graspable in terms that again arrest and ossify. And recognition, being recognized, becoming intelligible—on which living depends—involves a certain loss, a certain violence that one undergoes in this ossification, in this naming without which one could not be. But this does not mean that there is only one form of recognition or that this process would be unchangeable. Among the important features of this process of recognizing are that it is always governed by rules and norms, that it is discursive, and that it is material insofar as it is bodily. Furthermore, what interests us at this point is the aspect of how this embodiment of social norms comes about and which form it takes. It is informative, then, to turn here to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as it denotes a certain kind of bodily knowingness of social rules.

Understanding how to follow a rule presupposes knowing what it means to deviate from that rule. This understanding is not something that has to have been formulated beforehand; to follow a rule, a subject does not have to become cognizant of all that which the rule implies as prerogatives before understanding can be initiated, but understanding works on a basis of taken-for-granted knowledge of further explanatory rules. This understanding is not a purely cognitive one, but is always embodied. As Bourdieu puts it, "Practical belief is not a 'state of mind' ... but rather a state of the body" (*Logic of Practice* 68), since it has become sedimented over time and it partly becomes obvious in one's attitude to the world and to others. As Charles Taylor points out in his article "To Follow a Rule...," one needs not to have the proper descriptive terms for this attitude at hand to display and live it.[134] To capture this phenomenon, that one has learned what it means to follow certain rules and that this knowledge is a bodily hexis, Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus*. Such embodied understanding cannot be a private individual act, because it is social

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or to allocate separate aspects of these to entities, but rather Butler's point is to show the interrelation between passivity and activity and to raise the question how it works when one turns into the other.

practice that gives an individual action meaning and renders it intelligible. Although the *habitus* informs actions, it does not monocausally necessitate actions; actions are constituted where the *habitus* and the social fields meet, and they emerge in a process of negotiation and mediation of the demands of both of these.

Habitus as a bodily as well as social hexis draws attention to the role of the body in the constitution of social reality, as the body is the site of continuous enactment and sedimentation of history: "The *habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (*Logic of Practice* 56). *Habitus* is a creation of nature, a naturalization that can happen insofar as *history* is rendered forgotten and absent. It becomes clear here what "embodiment of norms" means, since "the body does not merely act in accordance with certain regularized or ritualized practices, but it *is* this sedimented ritual activity; its action, in this sense, is a kind of incorporated memory" ("Performativity's Social Magic" 115).[135] This is an ontological statement; *habitus* is the body's being: the ontological consequence of *habitus* is the body. The body being the *habitus* can be read in the Foucaultian sense in which the disciplinary stylization of the prisoner through which he is rendered and renders himself as a prisoner is first and foremost a bodily action. The *habitus* is formed in the social game through the "tacit normativity" that rules it, and "the body appropriates the rule-like character of the habitus through playing by those rules in the context of a given social field" ("Performativity's Social Magic" 115). *Habitus* thus entails a feeling for how to "play the game" and how to function within the norms and rules of the social fields in which one is immersed.

Understanding the formation of the *habitus* in terms of norms shaping the body as the sediment of the ritualized enactment of these norms classifies both body and *habitus* as strangely passive in their activity. This, however, is only one aspect of the generation of the *habitus*, which also comes about through mimetic identification, which is "a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an *imitation* that would presuppose a

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[134] Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule...," *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 29-44.

[135] Judith Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic," *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* 113-128.

conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model" (*Logic of Practice* 73). Two points stand out: first, the odd kind of activity that this activity of "practical mimesis" implies, and second, owing to precisely this mimetic character and passive activity, the proximity of this idea to Butler's concept of performativity. The mimetic move is an action that turns around the active-passive relation that has been established in the image of norms working upon the body. The body now seems to be that which takes action; it is the *habitus* that appropriates, mimes, and finally identifies with the demands encountered. At the same time, this activity retains a dimension of passivity as the motivation seems to remain a mystery. The driving force is obviously not a reflected decision that renders the identification desirable, but the desire for identification is generated in being subject to and being called by the social demands.

If the body were to imitate the rules and norms in the sense of a performance that is a conscious choice, it would not be possible that "the body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief" (*Logic of Practice* 73), because then, for example, weeping in the situation of grief would be a conscious decision. This means that the competence to participate and operate in the social field is possible only because of this sedimentation through identification being an incorporated and bodily knowledge that short-circuits knowingness and the body in the process of its formation. The *habitus* hence not only brings about social competence, but also sustains the field, because, being implicated in participation in the social field, it necessitates the conviction that this social field is a reality. The *habitus* presupposes this field as its condition for its possibility, but at the same time, the *habitus* shapes the social field and the social demands, since the social field is constituted by the practices and actions of those subjects who individually are themselves shaped through and in the formation of their bodily hexis and who collectively make up the social field. This means, as Butler puts it, that "the rules or norms, explicit or tacit, that form that field and its grammar of action, are themselves *reproduced* at the level of the *habitus* and, hence, implicated in the *habitus* from the start" ("Performativity's Social Magic" 117). The question that arises here, if norms and rules are constantly reproduced in the process of subject formation, is what kind of subjects emerge and how resistance and opposition against those norms that govern this process are possible at all.

Certainly the argument here is not that norms, by virtue of their being norms, *must* or ought to be opposed; the attempt is rather to come to an understanding of how norms and regulations function in forming bodies and subjects. With regard to resistance and critique, the question then becomes: How do we come to understand some norms as those we would want to oppose? How are we coming to deliberate and distinguish between violence and violence, norms and norms? A critical relationship to norms presupposes not only a certain distance from those norms, but also a certain freedom of responding to those norms, insofar as it must be possible to reject or incorporate the norms in question. Thus, we will need to ask how, if norms are bringing about the subjects that they regulate, it can become for these subjects to resist against the norms and regulations.

5.2 Unruly Subjects—Norms, Gaps, and Necessary Resistances

Subject formation orchestrated by norms and normalization brings about unruly subjects. There is an excess in this becoming subjected and subject; normalization works only insofar as it produces its own failure. Being addressed is precisely not the final word in subject formation,. but the inaugurated subject exceeds the scene of its inauguration and becomes active. This surplus of becoming, the subject's exceeding the conditions of its formation, has to be traced in two directions: firstly, in asking what happens between subjects, we have to attend to the ways in which naming is not a unilateral action, but presupposes and inaugurates some kind of relations and interactions, and secondly, in taking up the dimension of psychoanalytic theory again, we must ask how the materializing and totalizing aim of interpellation and the effect of interpellation are nonidentical.

The conditions of the addressing and naming that bring about the subject are irreducibly social and, as Butler sets out to show, do not work unilaterally and monocausally. Rather, the scene of the address is a scene in which this address turns out to depend on and operate logics of recognition that are not strictly symmetrical, but that operate and succeed, as well as fail, according to a series of temporal and positional asymmetries. As we have seen in both Althusser and Levinas, not only is

the one addressing compelled to acknowledge implicitly the addressee as a one who is to be addressed, but the address also depends on recognition by the addressee. This acknowledgment of the interpellator's authority is performed in the turning or, more generally, in the reacting of the interpellated. This still seems to mean that there is the one who addresses and the one who is being addressed, yet this interaction works on the premise only that the one addressing has already been instituted as a subject in language. This means that to address someone else, one has to be already named; thus, "such a subject in language is positioned as both addressed and addressing" (*ES* 29). The one subjected to the naming "becomes, potentially, one who might well name another in another time" (*ES* 29). This claim is core to the Butlerian account of subject formation, since it emphasizes that the subject that is formed in and through subjection exceeds this subjectivating power and is not limited to it. The effect of the inauguration of the subject is not predictable, and the subject instituted as a speaking subject by the naming might speak, name, or talk back. If this naming is not a singular act that inaugurates the subject once and for all, but if it depends on reiteration, "the vulnerability to being named constitutes a constant condition of the speaking subject" (*ES* 30). The naming other, then, is not "beyond interpellation" and therefore not outside the scope of the addressed one's talking back. And, at the same time, to have once been addressed, to have once been hailed by a painful name, does not mean that one cannot be painfully addressed again. There is a constitutive exposedness to being addressed, being potentially addressed painfully, but also to addressing and addressing potentially painfully that is beyond our direct control and knowing that then renders us open to each others.

The relation between the addresser and the addressee is asymmetrical, but it is also ineluctably unstable and can turn around, and in terms of the necessary recognition, it *must* turn around for interpellation to fully work. It is important to keep in mind that one is never simply and purely addressed, one never simply and purely becomes intelligible, but the process is always qualified in terms of an *as*-structure. One is addressed *as* someone; one becomes intelligible *as* someone. Consequently, social recognition that confers existence is never complete and stable due to its discursiveness. This discursiveness is not an abstract notion that could be dissociated from the concrete historical social situation, but it is utterly dependent on the reiterated intersubjective interaction, the intersubjective addressing and the entailed

reciprocal, though never ultimate, recognizing that is always bound to the specific context and yet is context-transcending.

The intertwined double characteristic of all discourse being simultaneously context-bound and context-transcendent causes the force of the naming to depend on, but not to be restricted to, the history and correct usage of the name. The notion of citationality of language elucidates how far utterances can only work and be powerful if they are cited. If actions and their meanings, a grammar of actions, so to speak, were not somehow instituted and codified, it would be impossible to understand and communicate. Citationality thus introduces a momentum of identity or sameness that brings to the foreground the historicity of utterances and actions. Drawing on Derrida, Butler asserts the necessary repeatability that is a constitutive feature of any sign in order to be a sign. The force of the name, therefore, is constituted by the sedimented history of the name, the precipitated usages that become over time internal to that very name (see *ES* 36). This kind of "internalization" that conceals "the constitutive conventions by which it [the usage of the name or utterance] is mobilized" (*BTM* 227) is precisely the effect of performativity and at the same time is the condition on which the performative can be effective in the first place. If this covering up, this inaugurating of the name as an entity with its own life and power, does not work, the performative speech act fails; the name remains unsuccessful in creating a reality, which means that the name fails to name.

This life that words and expressions have of their own is important for what it means to be responsible for one's speech actions, because making a discursive move then cannot be a "remaking language ex nihilo, but rather ... [a] negotiating the legacies of usage that constrain and enable that speaker's speech" (*ES* 27). The conferral of intelligibility denotes the productivity of embodied, lived norms. Furthermore, the productivity of the signifying rules calls for reiteration because otherwise the established meaning could not be understood nor remain as understood. To communicate, it is necessary to reiterate the signifying rules and hermeneutic paradigms through which an utterance becomes possible and within which it is situated; otherwise, if these utterances were utterly novel and absolutely unrelated to any signifying rule and any hermeneutic paradigm, the speech act or action would remain meaningless. I can address you because I have been addressed before and I can address you only because the language is not yours, not mine, but radically exceeds

both of us, renders us vulnerable to the social histories and conditions of the language we use to name.[136] And the address only works insofar as a reduplication of the utterance itself necessarily occurs, firstly, when it is uttered, because this act is the redeployment of words, phrases, concepts, and syntactic and communicative rules. Secondly, a reduplication of the utterance takes place when it is received and understood by someone. Reduplication shows that there is always a gap or a break in every unit in a process of communication. Because of this rupture, reiteration never produces the identically same; there is a break, an absence within the utterance by virtue of which it becomes repeatable and by virtue of which it can function, but this break and nonidentity also means that the utterance is radically exposed to change, that it cannot be secured in its meaning and performance. Hence, Butler contends that the norms orchestrating intelligibility are always possibly subject to the phenomenon of resignification.[137] Consequently, the signification process that determines subject formation can never come to a full closure and is always subject to resignification as the emerging subjects act and interact. One could even argue that although death in a sense is final, as it puts an end to the possibility of reflexive self-relation, not even with the death of a person does subject formation necessarily come to full closure, but that even then it radically exceeds the subject so long as remembering reaches into the present. Human finitude would then have to be thought as always falling short with regard to subject formation, with finitude as an odd kind of inexhaustibility.

Theorizing subject formation cannot predict or determine in advance what the outcome and effects will be. Rather, theorizing figures as a critique, as an interruption in the hope of opening a horizon for imagining how it could be different. But the outcome of the norms and addresses at work in subject formation is not predeterminable, neither with regard to the individual action nor with regard to the signifying rules that are the underlying grammar of the action. An example from

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[136] Butler deals with this question in connection with the problematic of recognition in the first lecture, "An Account of Oneself," in her *Adorno Lectures*.

[137] As Jacques Derrida has argued, the performative force of a sign or an utterance depends on its iterability, namely, that it is not restricted to its situation of production. This means that the communicability of a sign or an utterance presupposes a breaking with the horizon of its prior occurrence, which means that the sign's or utterance's identity is always a "corrupted" one. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988) 1-23.

Butler's *Excitable Speech* and a reformulation of that example might demonstrate this openness of the outcome of resignification: "By understanding the false or wrong invocations as *reiterations*," Butler writes, "we see how the form of social institutions undergoes change and alteration and how an invocation that has no prior legitimacy can have the effect of challenging existing forms of legitimacy, breaking open the possibility of future forms. When Rosa Parks sat in the front of the bus, she had no prior right to do so guaranteed by any of the segregationist conventions of the South. And yet, in laying claim to the right for which she had no *prior* authorization, she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the process overthrowing of those established codes of legitimacy" (*ES* 147). With a few replacements, however, the scene could just as easily read as follows: "By understanding the false or wrong invocations as *reiterations*, we see how the form of social institutions undergoes change and alteration and how an invocation that has no prior legitimacy can have the effect of challenging existing forms of legitimacy, breaking open the possibility of future forms. When [Hitler ordered the Deutsche Wehrmacht to march into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, he] had no prior right to do so guaranteed by any of the [international] conventions [...]. And yet, in laying claim to the right for which [he] had no *prior* authorization, [he] endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy." As this shows, the redeployment of utterances and other acts—the act of reappropriation—can bring about actions that might be applauded, condoned—or condemned. The point here is merely to show the openness for the possibility of reappropriation that is ensured by the inevitable slippage that takes place due to the character of iterability, no matter what judgments we might make concerning the utterance or the act.

This openness does not yet mean that all actions are rendered indistinguishable and that we will not and cannot evaluate actions, but this openness is precisely characterized by the impossibility to ensure and predetermine the outcome. The question, then, is how and where we develop not only criteria for our evaluating and deciding on which actions and effects to condone and which to condemn, but also we need to ask where a reflection on these criteria would enter into this discussion and what status they have. Butler has argued vehemently against the possibility of theoretically delimiting and prescribing a set of universal criteria, which then would only result in a question of their application. But she has also clarified more recently

that universality is not violent as such, but that it can always become violent: "When a universal precept cannot, for social reasons, be appropriated or when, indeed, for social reasons, it must be refused, the universal precept itself becomes a site of contest, a theme and an object of democratic debate. It loses its status as a precondition of democratic debate; if it operated there, as a precondition, as a *sine qua non* of participation itself, it would impose its violence in the form of an exclusionary foreclosure" (*AL* 18). What interests me here are the "social reasons" on which Butler does not elaborate further, but that turn out to be what is at the core of the decisions regarding how to deal with universal rules. When Butler offers that "[universality's] violence consists in part in its indifference to the social conditions under which a living appropriation might become possible" (*AL* 18), this seems to suggest that the "social reasons" may be bound to precisely these social conditions that are rendered invisible and the violence of exclusion that is created through the operation and enforcement of the universal norm. But this does not mean that now the intensification of violence or a norm of nonviolence could be simply posited as a criterion for evaluation. The questions coming into view here are in what ways a norm of nonviolence might operate and how precisely the reflection on violence is bound up with subject formation.

The problem we run into with universal precepts is not only that of applying the precept to historically contingent situations, but insofar as the universal is itself historically contingent, we already run into problems when we wonder how to argue for a general criterion. What, then, would it take to offer a critique of violence as that criterion? What is the theoretical locus and function of such an inquiry? There seems to be a desire to be able to distinguish clearly between what is to be welcomed and what is to be opposed, and at the same time it is impossible to secure such a distinction theoretically. The task of critique here, then, appears to be to attend to both the desire for clarity and security and the impossibility of securing clarity. Perhaps an inroad to such an inquiry would be to think about the temporality implied here. There are two temporalities intertwined in this desire to be able to distinguish, at least to distinguish clearly at the level of theory. On the one hand, there is the question of past events and how to attend to what has happened and what has become, what is. On the other hand, this dimension is bound up with a desire that opens up towards the future. The question "what should I do?" as a question of how to act responsibly—as a

certain suspension of interest in justification—seems to be primarily an interest in what kind of person I might become, a question of how to make decisions possible, how to reflect and eventually dare the decision.

To argue that the desire for certainty is unsatisfiable and might have to be suspended in the moment of action does not put the issue at hand to rest. How do we come to oppose certain forms of violence? What kind of deliberation is involved here? How do we account for and reflect on the criteria that we come to apply? How do we come to distinguish between forms of violence? The difficulty here is to think openness in subject formation and to reflect on how a reflection on distinguishing between norms and actions enters without foreclosing on that primary openness. This openness is bound up with the phenomenon of slippage, since this slippage concerns not only the reappropriation of social norms and regulations but also the subject position that is the I that has been discursively inaugurated by being addressed by the other. This subject position is signified and generated by a name; nevertheless, the name and that which it attempts to name remain irreducibly incommensurable. The subject that is inaugurated by the name exceeds the name and the name exceeds what it inaugurated. The name one is hailed by can mean an affirmation for the addressee, but it can also mean an insult; it all depends on the context, which is "the effective historicity and spatiality of the sign" (*PL* 96). As Butler argues, the name can be both politically enabling as well as paralyzing—and it seems that here it would be important to show how resignification—the assumption of power by the one hailed by the one violated—is, in fact, possible. In *Excitable Speech,* one of Butler's main points is to show that there is a gap between the speech act and its consequences. J. L. Austin's account of speech acts shows that it is impossible to fully theorize and account for the conditions of the utterance's success. The gap between the utterance and its effects cannot be closed, and their relation remains radically contingent. But Butler's aim is not to assert our being vulnerable to the effects of language; rather, she is interested in how this gap—while and because of never being fully under our control—can be politically mobilized for purposes of resistance and politically motivated resignification.

The condition of possibility of such resistance is that any speech act can work only insofar it can possibly fail to achieve its aim. Otherwise, if it could not fail, then there could be no intentional motivation of the speech act: every word would merely

mechanistically perform. So if Butler inscribes the possibility for resistance into the gap between act and its effects, then at least two questions become important for us: What does this mean for what kind of resistance subjects can come to exercise? And what happens to the meaning of acts of bodily violence? In other words, what does this account of resistance and agency mean in cases where the threat of bodily violence is so real that a creative and thus subversive reaction to the interpellation becomes practically impossible for the subject?

Butler's theory of agency relies on the fact that there will always be room or resources for resistance. Yet it is crucial to attend to the rhetorical structure of Butler's inquiry as well, because she is neither simply describing or prescribing a certain way of acting or resisting; instead, she performs a theory of agency. In other words, the possibility of resistance always remains a fragile and dangerous enterprise. It is always possible in practice that the gap will be factually closed, while theoretically it remains inexhaustible. The inexhaustibility of this resource for resistance depends on the incongruency between the subjecting power and the power of the subjectivated. This incongruency is the subject's exceeding the conditions of its emergence, namely, the subjecting and subjectivating call, which is ensured by the "constitutive failure of the performative" (*BTM* 122), as this guarantees the nonidentity of the subject hailed and the subject emerging. But certainly this "guarantee" is a guarantee without guarantees, a fragile guarantee, since the impossibility to ensure outcomes also means that theoretical accounts can never ensure the actuality of resistance, but can merely attempt to account for the possibility and hope that perhaps the hailed I might come to be able to seize and mobilize the gap that opens up the horizon for forging a new future from the past. Butler reasons, "Interpellation thus [owing to the constitutive failure] loses its status as simple performative, an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers, and creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent" (*BTM* 122). Interpellation therefore does not only involve a potential misrecognition, insofar as one can be mistaken for someone or something, but it also involves a necessary misrecognition, insofar as the name one is

called can never achieve its totalizing effect.[138] The I that is produced as a speaking subject by the incessant addresses cannot simply turn against these names or "extract itself from the historicity of that chain or rise itself up and confront that chain as if it were an object opposed to me, which is not me, but only what others have made of me" (*BTM* 122). To speak and to resist, the subject always assumes and draws on its enabling interpellation; this implication of the subjectivating power in the act of opposition, however, does not mean that resistance is impossible per se. That would only be the case if the subjecting norms turned out to be an unchangeable monolith because they are fixed in their position and content as an ahistorical condition of possibility. The possibility of resistance and agency depends on the historicity and changeability of the norms; in other words, resistance and agency are possible if "to be enabled by the relations of power that the 'I' opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms" (*BTM* 123). Butler's account for the *possibility* of agency depends on her argument for the nonidentity of the subject and for the multiplicity and nonidentity of power relations. The nonidentity of the subject is explored in her discussion of foreclosure and repression in subject formation, i.e., in the necessary production of the unconscious and its very own *Eigensinn*, or stubborn persistence, that ensures its nonobliterability from the conscious, from, as it were, the psychic life of power. The nonidentity of power relations or of the law then needs to be investigated along the trajectories of a historicity that owes itself to the necessity of enactment or embodiment—the proliferation of the law only works through its being lived—and to citationality, the context-bound repetition that is subject to slippage.

"The law" and "the norms" as they stand, or "interpellation" as an isolated term, make the social and historical condition of these quickly forgotten, attesting to the strange anonymity inherent in the language and the names by which one is addressed, although these terms depend for their authority on their being inhabited and animated by persons. The power of the name one is called is intricately bound up with the injunctions of normalization, which, invested with the power of the act of interpellating, impose certain sets of ideals upon one to which one has to respond.

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[138] This notion of misrecognition is based on the Lacanian notion of *méconnaissance* and is the other function of ideology that Althusser mentions, without exploring it, besides that of ideological recognition, which he discusses in detail (see *ISA* 161-2).

Thus, it seems apt to call this injunction a *symbolic* injunction to which one has to react. This can either be by accepting the terms by which one has been called or by rejecting them, but in the sense of a concrete negation, the terms rejected are proliferated in precisely this act of refutation. Implied here is a further explanation of how to understand the "social," as it is specified, to be structured by injunctions that are characterized as symbolic. The latter denotes the discursive constitution of the social realm within which subjects emerge. Since interpellation and the imposition of injunctions presuppose a connection with power, Butler offers the following as a clarification of her understanding of the social: "The category of the 'social' reintroduces a conception of language as a practice, a conception of language in relation to power and, hence, a theory of discourse" (*CHU* 270). Discourse cannot be captured as a homogenous signifying practice, but denotes the overlappings among the different hierarchies and signifying patterns that make up discourse and power relations. This means that the question of subversiveness and disruptiveness cannot be separated from the contexts in which it occurs. And, furthermore, subversion and disruption are not excluded from possibly becoming normalizing ideals in certain contexts. In the social, there are multivectorial normalizing patterns at work that are demanding the subject cultivate itself according to their prescriptions; at the same time, it is necessary to keep in mind the strange desire of wanting to be "normal" that accounts for the passionate attachment of the emergent subject to these patterns of normalization.

The question of what Butler's discursiveness includes and what it does not has been continuously asked by Butler's critics, and in particular Isabell Lorey has argued that Butler's understanding of discourse needs to be expanded to include nonlinguistic practices such as the practices of everyday life, rituals, and institutional customs, among others.[139] In my reading of Butler's terms, however, discursiveness already comprises the practices Lorey suggests Butler needs to include, as they are practices of signification. They are not nondiscursive, strictly speaking, because performed actions or practices are necessarily discursive insofar as they are meaningful only due to some shared understanding of a grammar of action, and for them to work, they

depend on and are subject to interpretation and misinterpretation. Regarding social practices such as institutional practices or gestures as discursive and linguistic in terms of depending on an underlying grammar of action does not mean that they are themselves linguistic practices in the narrow sense of deploying words.

There remains a difference, yet a difference in degree of linguisticality and not so that there could be symbolic practices that were to be understood as fully nonlinguistic because having signifying and communicative power implies an inherent linguisticality. Furthermore, the question is whether this difference as such is of great importance here at all, as the concern here is the *discursive* condition of subject formation. Nevertheless, that such a broader concept of discursiveness underlies Butler's theorizing becomes obvious when she, for example, questions Bourdieu's strict differentiation between the social and the linguistic dimension of discursive practices (see "Performativity's Social Magic" 119-126). This is not to say that there are no differences between these practices. In her 2002 Adorno Lectures, Butler returns to the question of address and subject formation and inquires into the rhetorical dimension of the address. She notes with regard to the issue of recognition that while we depend on and desire recognition, not all addresses count as recognition in the same way (see *AL* 46). By introducing the rhetorical aspect, the question of social over and against linguistic discursiveness seems no longer to be the salient issue at hand, but rather we might detect a greater difference between an "it's so good to see you" uttered in a genuinely friendly and enthusiastic way and a "you bitch!" uttered in a hostile way than between an enthused "good to see you" or a genuine hug, without words, with which one could be greeted. The political relevance of this difference becomes obvious when looking at symbolic practices, such as inequalities in payment based on gender difference and being hailed on the street. The point here is that both of these practices at their core depend on their being effective, which again is inseparably linked with their materiality as well as their discursiveness. Thus, analyzing the rhetorical dimension by inquiring into the various figures, forms, and styles of discursive interaction can afford grasping the works of subjection and empowerment in more differentiated ways in this regard.

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[139] Isabell Lorey, *Immer Ärger mit dem Subjekt: Theoretische und politische Konsequenzen eines*

In the act of responding to an address that is necessarily an interpretation, some action as well as some subject is recognized and a connection between these two is established in some way, but at the same time, this recognition always also fails to work comprehensively and thus opens the gap for reappropriation and resistance due to the necessary misrecognition that takes place. This necessary misrecognition makes it *possible* that the norms and rituals of interpellation through which we become recognized can *possibly* be resisted and reappropriated, but this necessary misrecognition by no means *is* or ensures resignification. Hence, it is crucial for Butler to ask, "What are the possibilities of politicizing *dis*identification, this experience of *misrecognition*, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?" (*BTM* 219) One does and does not belong, one is and is not—this experience is the strange experience of one's being neither able to fully embrace nor fully refuse the name, the position, the sign that one comes to inhabit, under which one comes to find oneself. The key to politicization seems to lie in this "*experience* of misrecognition," which Butler describes as "uneasy" and which demands a response. The response is demanded, as we saw, because interpellation requires the response of the interpellated. The possibility of politicization is, then, bound to a "[taking] up the political signifier (which is always a matter of taking up a signifier by which one is oneself already taken up, constituted, initiated)" (*BTM* 219). Butler offers that the political potential may emerge in a certain kind of taking up, assuming and accepting the signifier that one did not choose and whose history one comes to inherit or in whose history one begins to find oneself strangely implicated. But in order to be able to assume that unchosen name, the name by which one was chosen, in ways that promise political potential, a certain alienation and estrangement seems to be necessary.

This means that there is a kind of possibly painful—at least "uneasy"—exclusion that one has to undergo and that keeps political life alive. Butler therefore remarks, "That there can be no final or complete inclusivity is thus a function of the complexity and historicity of a social field that can never be summarized by any given description, and that for democratic reasons, ought never to be" (*BTM* 221). The

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juridischen Machtmodells—Judith Butler (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1996).

trouble—and often painful experience—however is that this impossibility of final inclusivity, the necessary movement of exclusions and struggles over the negotiation of these delimitations in the social, is not only a systemic phenomenon, but that there are persons living and undergoing these exclusions and struggles. The task is to hold both perspectives in view as one asks what this "politicization" means precisely, how we come to grapple with the impossibility of final inclusivity without giving up the possibility of change and ameliorating the violence of exclusion.

5.3 The Butlerian Conceptualization of Agency

In Butler's theory of subject formation, the specific problem has been the relation between the kind of resistance traced to this point to the kind of resistance that has a distinct political and ethical character. German allows for a differentiation between these two kinds of resistance by distinguishing *Widerständigkeit* from *Widerstand.* Inevitable and involuntary resistance (*Widerständigkeit*) is an undirected and rather passive phenomenon that functions like an unconscious foot getting continuously stuck in the door, whereas reflected and willed resistance (*Widerstand*) is a directed and more active phenomenon that operates as conscious and concrete resistance. While the two phenomena cannot be as neatly delimited and separated from each other as it might seem by introducing two different terms for them, resistancy clearly is the condition of the possibility for resistance. The distinction is blurred when one understands transcendental conditions of the possibility for some phenomenon not as existing independent from this phenomenon; in this case, the question arises how this dependency figures and what it means if one thinks resistancy, for example, as somehow also dependent on the cultivation of the practice of resistance. This study has not and will not make use of a possible linguistic distinction between these two kinds of resistance in the text by introducing "resistancy" as distinct from "resistance." Such a clear linguistic delimitation would encourage the idea that there are indeed two distinct kinds of resistance, whereas it seems rather to be the case that two aspects or dimensions of resistance are inseparably bound up with each other. The question of agency, however, is not only about resistance, but more generally about

what it means for the subject as I when this I comes to deliberate, decide, and act. What kind of self-relation is inscribed and practiced in and through acting?

The possibility of agency is assumed and insisted on in the Butlerian account of subject formation, as can be shown by an examination of Butler's account of agency, but Butler also has substantial resistances against "agency" as a transcendental capability of the subject, as an ability that would not need to face the conditions of its own becoming. Such an account of agency would imply and reinstitute the subject as eventually coming to exist at a safe distance from the norms and practices that he or she opposes.[140] Over and against this argument for the subject being the effect of the very acts that it performs, the critical question uttered is how subjects can then act in the sense of being able to deliberate, being able to reflect on past effects and future potential effects, being able to make decisions and act upon them. To tackle this problematic, it will be necessary to inquire what concept of agency Butler actually argues.

Subject formation in terms of "performativity" is explained lucidly in *Bodies That Matter*, in which performativity is described by Butler as the reiteration of norms (see *BTM* 94-95). The performatively emerging subject is the product of the repetition of the social signifying norms that confer intelligibility. It would be to mistake the core idea of performativity to understand this subject as one *performing* the repetition of norms, as if in a theatrical performance in which one comes along as such-and-such an individual and now enacts another particular role on the stage that then enacts, "seduces to life," this stage persona. Instead, the repetition of norms is "what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (*BTM* 95) and the repetition occurs in a ritualized form constituting the subject over time.

The question that arises here is what performativity means with regard to agency. The fact that the "agency issue" remains unresolved is a criticism often leveled against

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[140] Compare with this Butler's arguing agency as a transcendental condition of subjectivity: "What notion of 'agency' will that be which always and already knows its transcendental ground, and speaks only and always from that ground? To be so grounded is nearly to be buried: it is to refuse alterity, to reject contestation, to decline that risk of self-transformation perpetually posed by democratic life" (131-132; Judith Butler, "For a Careful Reading," *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, by Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser. [New York: Routledge, 1995] 127-144).

Butler's contentions.[141] Butler famously has stated her argument as being "that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (*GT* 181) and has expressed the radicality of this argument by also turning against the existentialist claim to a structure of self and its acts that is prediscursive. The problem of the accounts that argue for the cultural construction of the subject while maintaining that agency is the capability of the subject to reflexively mediate its embeddedness is that such accounts are unable to understand the subject as fully *constituted* through culture and society; instead, the subject merely is shaped and formed by these. The main problem that Butler sees arising from this is that one then could understand complete and utter social construction as social *determination*, and therefore she elaborates on the role of iterability as a constitutive element in her concept of performativity that allows for change and resignification. Agency is inscribed through and within discourse, which is "the horizon of agency" ("For a Careful Reading" 135), since through discourse the doer is instituted behind the deed and discourse is that in which the possibilities for resignification, the possibilities for variation of the necessary repetition, are located. Agency thus is an effect on subject formation, which itself is dependent on the workings of power. This relation is a twofold acting on the subject by power, insofar as "first, [power acts in the subject] as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's 'own' acting" (*PL* 14). Although power occasions the subject, this by no means requires that the subject's power that is "its" agency is coextensive with the enabling power, because social construction does not, as already mentioned, mean social determination. Since *Gender Trouble* Butler's point has been that any account of agency "cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility" (*GT* xxiv), and casting agency in terms

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[141] See Edwina Barvosa-Carter, "Strange Tempest: Agency, Poststructuralism, and the Shape of Feminist Politics to Come," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6 (2001): 123-137; Seyla Benhabib, "Feminism and Postmodernism," *Feminist Contentions* 17-34; Seyla Benhabib, "Subjectivity, Historiography, and Politics," *Feminist Contentions* 107-126; Lisa Disch, "Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative," *Political Theory* 27 (1999): 545-559; Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Lise Nelson, "Bodies (and Spaces) Do Matter: The Limits of Performativity," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 6 (1999): 331-353; Lisa H. Schwartzman, "Hate Speech, Illocution, and Social Context: A Critique of Judith Butler," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33.3 (2002): 421-441; Veronica Vasterling, "Butler's Sophisticated Constructivism: A Critical Assessment," *Hypatia* 14.3 (1999): 17-38.

of the iterability of performativity allows for a theorizing of agency that can think agency only through interrogating the specific constellations of norms that, in exerting and conferring power, give rise to specific instances and expressions of agency. The possibility of resignification, the gap between the "original" operation of norms and the rearticulation of these norms, then, is the condition of the possibility of agency, and Butler seems to imply that agency as such is performed in the taking up of this possibility, in the transformation of the possibility into an actuality.

Butler further argues that critical inquiry into subject formation and an understanding of resignification are to be understood as necessary components of ethical and political judgment. Resignification is not meant to provide and cannot provide a fully fleshed-out theory of ethical and political decision-making, but is a necessary condition for the possibility of agency because it holds open the space for the possibility of change by bringing into relief the status of the essential inevitability conferred upon norms. Butler's project is not to do away with agency or the notion of the ethical, but to mobilize precisely the contingency and contestability of the terms, norms, values, and positions under which we come to stand and to which we might have become attached.

Butler's account for the possibility of agency is dependent on resignification and the production of necessary resistance in subject formation in the form of the production of the remainder. This follows from the contingency and historicity of the norms of subject formation and from the nonidentity of the subject. The contingency and historicity of the signifying norms depend on their necessary iterability. Iterability that necessitates and enables resignification then is a condition of the possibility of agency and resistance insofar as it shows that one is not fully predetermined by the signifying norms, precisely because they are not beyond the social, because they are not ahistorical, and thus, in depending on being enacted, they are always vulnerable to change. The other condition of the possibility of agency is that the subject that emerges in the *assujetissement*, in the subordinating and inaugurating tropological movement, always exceeds its conditioning. This exceeding is conceptualized by Butler with regard to its psychic dimension, as her project is to reconsider agency so that a theory of it accounts for the "double workings of social power and psychic reality" (*CHU* 151), because subjectivation and agency cannot be understood as occasioned by a unidirectional internalization of external norms. The question for

Butler is why and how this internalization takes place and how the transformation of the passive being acted upon into that of one actively acting occurs.

To understand this process, Butler suggests that norms are effective only because they operate phantasmatically, which means for her "the phantasmatic attachment to ideals that are at once social and psychic" (*CHU* 151). Norms are not merely embodied, but in their embodiment they are also interpreted, and in this interpretation they are subject to temporality. Owing to their dependency on being put into action, i.e., being enacted and embodied, norms thus are exposed as subject to contingency and alterability. Butler thus recasts norms as "incorporated and interpreted features of existence that are sustained by the idealizations furnished by fantasy" (*CHU* 152). This phantasmatic staging of certain "positions" or "identifications" orchestrated by these norms always happens at the price of the disavowal of other sets of identifications; thus, there is always a remainder produced that is the site of contestation within the subject itself. This remainder is the unconscious that is formed and excluded in the formation of the conscious subject; as a necessary remainder, in psychoanalytic theory, the unconscious is said to resist the normative demands of signification. This psychoanalytic resistance is not yet, however, political resistance, as Kirsten Campbell rightly points out.[142] Resistance in the full sense is what Butler has recently posited as the double task of the critic, comprising, firstly, "to show how knowledge and power work to constitute a more or less systematic way of ordering the world with its own 'conditions of acceptability of a system'" and, secondly, "to track the way in which that field meets ... the sites where it fails to constitute the intelligibility for which it stands" ("What Is Critique?" 222). For Butler, critical action, in accordance with Foucault, is cast as the risking of one's own intelligible existence in order to expose the limits of the epistemological field that orders the way of our knowing and acting.

A critical intervention thus is an uncertain transformation of the possibility for action into the actuality of action that calls the naturalization of the ritualistic

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[142] Kirsten Campbell, "The Plague of the Subject: Psychoanalysis and Judith Butler's *Psychic Life of Power*," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6 (2001): 35-48.

reiteration of the enabling discursive practices into question.[143] Nevertheless, Butler constantly avoids some questions that arise in the context of her admitting that not "every new possibility *qua* possibility" is to be heralded.[144] Butler states that her project is not to determine "whether certain kinds of significations are good or bad, warranted or unwarranted" ("For a Careful Reading" 138), but she wishes to know "what constitutes the domain of discursive possibilities within which and about which such questions can be posed" ("For a Careful Reading" 138).[145] In connection with this delimitation of her own project, which aims towards an amelioration of the networks through which subjects are produced by exposing these networks, she also

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[143] An example for such an intervention is given by Butler in her discussion of drag as gender parody, because in drag, by creating a distinction between a naturalized privileged position or performance and one that appears as derived and mimetic, a reflexive space for agency is opened up. A common misinterpretation of Butler's argument is that parody—and, in some cases, even more specifically drag—is rendered by Butler as the privileged paradigm for subversion, endowed with positive value. Butler's intention, however, merely is to show the possibility of subversion and the contingency of naturalized paradigms. Similarly, her argument for the reappropriation of "woman" and "queer" presents these examples *as examples only* for how connotations of terms are open to resignification over time. Within the reflexive space, it becomes possible to redescribe and reconfigure one's existence, as well as the norms delimiting the epistemological field enabling one's existence, and Butler appears to understand such practices of redescription and reconfiguration as expressions of agency.

[144] As Butler contends, not every resignificatory practice is to be condoned: "The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible" (*GT* 189). The question rehearsed by Edwina Barvosa-Carter, whether all resignification is subversive with regard to the hegemonic norm, has to be answered affirmatively, yet just because some practice is subversive does not mean that it is to be tolerated or even supported. It becomes very clear what Butler means here if we look at the example of Afghan women, who under the Taliban regime were forced to wear the burqua and so completely cover themselves in public in order not to be perceivable as individuals. Yet there are women who had been educated and who had before the Taliban actively participated in public life who fled Afghanistan because of their oppositional work, because these possibilities of understanding "being a woman" had been rendered culturally impossible under the Taliban. The example of the existence of these women shows that subversion is not about inventing new and fully novel possibilities, but the goal is to open these existing forms of impossible life as real possibilities within this society in which they have been rendered impossible.

[145] This argument takes place with regard to the question of subject formation and is not dealing with the question how rearticulations are then evaluated and judged and how criteria are to be derived. The point is to show that resignification means the openness and changeability of the ruling hegemonic norm, as it has been already pointed out with regard to the example of Parks' and Hitler's actions. Concerning the difference between these examples, one has to look at their aims and motivations and that difference is one that shows that we have moved into the realm of politics and ethics and into questions of how "exclusion" and "intensification of violence" are to be understood. This, then, leads to several subsequent questions. Firstly, if violence and exclusion are the criteria for ethical and political assessment, the task is to reflect on the status of these criteria. Secondly, it is necessary to ask about the status of subject formation for a concept of ethics. Is it that the question of subject formation is prior to the questions of the ethical? These questions are not dealt with by Butler in her present concept of subject formation. She is interested instead in showing the institution of the subject as a paradoxical formation in order to call into question ethical and political practices that establish the subject and the subject's identity as a prediscursive reality that then has to be discursively captured and is discursively formed, but that still allows one to seek recourse to natural universals. Her criticism takes issue with certain kinds of universalism and proceduralism that drains the

concedes that this is not the singular goal of theory and that deliberations about social and economic justice are deliberations not primarily involved in questions of subject formation (see "For a Careful Reading" 141). The openness of Butler's theory has its *fundamentum in re* and thus is a programmatic one, as the purpose is to open the sites of contestation and allow those forms of life in to participate in the contest that had been previously rendered unintelligible; the purpose is not to make a prescription in terms of "subvert ... in the way that I say, and life will be good" (*GT* xxi).[146] It is, crucially, not possible to delineate a theoretical procedure of how the decision is formed for which practices are to be condemned and which are to be condoned, since it is the very openness and undecidability of the project of critique that returns us to the political struggles of our lives. Critique as a mode of theorizing, then, figures theory as "an activity that is not restricted to the academy. It takes place every time a possibility is imagined, a collective self-reflection takes place, or a dispute over values, priorities, and language emerges" ("The End of Sexual Difference" 416). The task that emerges alongside these debates is, as Butler continues, to figure out how to best practice these debates productively, but their outcomes can neither be secured nor adjudicated prior to entering these debates. If, then, critique as interrogation and as daring the very terms by which we become is constitutively marked by openness, the question that arises and emerges as a task for theory here is a reflection on the role and status of this openness. Is this openness, then, emerging here as a normative criterion, as Heike Kämpf suggests?[147] But what does this openness mean for openness as a

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concrete situation of its life by establishing it as categorizable and thus denies as a theory its own circumstances in its formation.

[146] As Lisa Disch points out, a question regularly posed to Butler is how transformative action can be affirmed if it is not enabled by a utopian account giving it direction and not supplied with criteria independent of power. It is impossible to come up with a vision of "beyond power" or one that is criteria independent, because, as Butler eloquently argues, it is only through the works of power and within the multivectorial networks of power relations that subjects emerge and become agents. Her account needs to remain anti-utopian, as Elliot Jurist argues, because of the "competing tendencies in Butler: her 'post-liberatory' politics concedes the limits of what can be done, but her political activism refuses compliance" (Elliot L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency* [Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2000] 280).

[147] Heike Kämpf, "Politische Philosophie as Sprachkritik. Zum Machtdiskurs bei Judith Butler," *Dialektik* 2 (2002): 101-116. Kämpf argues, "So it is not in the first place a matter of distinguishing good from bad reworkings of the concept, ... but the reworkability itself is the normative criterion with regard to which language and linguistic practice have to be measured" ("Es geht also nicht in erster Linie um eine Unterscheidung von guten und schlechten Umarbeitungen des Begriffs, ... sondern die *Umarbeitungsfähigkeit* selbst ist das normative Kriterium, an dem sich die Sprache und die Sprachpraxis zu messen haben" [116]).

normative criterion? To reflect on the normative criteria implied in a theoretical account is not a reflection that could be carried out once, leaving the question theoretically settled and retaining the normative dimension only as a practical question of application and implementation. Rather, the movement in which theory reflects on its own normative framework is the very moment in which theory itself becomes self-reflexive and self-reflective, in which theory enters into a critical relation with itself and its own conditions of emergence and sustenance. While the normative might then be said to always reenter performatively in practice, perhaps it is available to theory always only through critique and as a question, insofar as theory arises at and through the limits of practice. The normative, we could then say, figures as the trauma of theory, the originary traumatism in response to which theory comes to life.

But apart from the normative and the question of how normative arguments enter, reenter, and are offered, the task for thinking about subject formation is also to ask how the subjects that seize the power that forms them become capable of deliberation and intention. Enabling and broadening the possibility of social and political activity as the activity of subjects is part of Butler's theoretical enterprise, and as her works show in making her points related to social and political agency, Butler does presuppose the subject's capability for deliberate action. In her contribution "Contingent Foundations" in *Feminist Contentions*, Butler contends that the act exceeds the agent, which in turn exposes the problematic of agency, because the effects of an action can inaugurate effects themselves in places and ways that had not been foreseen. Nevertheless, when Butler argues that "the action continues to act after the intentional subject has announced its completion" ("Contingent Foundations" 45), she invokes an *intentional* subject that is able to reflect on its action and consider it completed.[148] To determine this completion, the subject must be capable of forming intentions and be capable of a reflexive relation to itself and its intention. Butler also does not deny that subjects make decisions and have intentions. Her main point appears to be that the subject is not the origin of its action insofar as the action always goes beyond the subject because the horizon and field within which the action is

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[148] The problem of conceptualizing *conscious* agency and *deliberate intentional* action in Butler has been uttered explicitly by Lise Nelson, who sees the reason for this difficulty that Butler "conceives of conscious

performed is delimited beforehand; i.e., which actions are available for deployment is circumscribed and how an action comes to be effective is beyond the subject's control. Furthermore, an action continues to have effects beyond the time of the subject. Butler emphasizes this when she states that "[t]he speaking subject makes his or her decision only in the context of an already circumscribed field of linguistic possibilities" (*ES* 129). If making a decision here, however enabled only through the limitations, means that the subject does not deploy the utterance randomly, but consciously and purposefully, then this subject must be able to deliberate and be able to form an idea about what it means to utter the sentence it is about to speak and what it means for him/herself to utter this sentence. This is not to say that one needs to know or could even know the precise outcome of one's actions, but that in becoming self-reflective, one experiences oneself as extended over time and comes to relate to oneself and imagine what it means to act in this or that way, to deploy these or those sentences, no matter whether this idea will then coincide with the outcome.[149]

Regarding her argument prior to the *Adorno Lectures,* one could have claimed that an inquiry into this self-reflective relation of oneself to oneself was missing from her account of subject formation. On the one hand, Butler in her earlier work has been insisting, as we've seen, on the necessity to historicize the process of subject formation and resignification, as she fervently argues for the historicity of norms and thus for their historical contingency. But, on the other hand, her subjects have seemed to have a history that is only perceivable from a theoretical point of view; they themselves have appeared unable to perceive themselves as historical beings, as instituted by and emerging in and over time. They cannot quite form an intention and act upon it, as they cannot quite conceive of themselves in terms of a back-referential and anticipatory structure of action. This dimension of a back-reference is pointed out by Michael Levenson in his review of *Psychic Life of Power* and *Excitable Speech,* where he pointedly formulates this question of there being no "sense that we live and change through time" in the Butlerian system when he notices that Butler's "subjects

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agency as stemming from an *autonomous* (pre-discursive) subject" (340). Another critic pointing to this aspect is Veronica Vasterling in her essay "Butler's Sophisticated Constructivism: A Critical Assessment."

[149] This contention does not conflict with Butler's insistence that agency is not to be understood as the property of the subject in terms of inherent freedom or will, but that agency is "an effect of power[;] it is

never really grow: They are always only being founded, caught in the nest where they were first hatched" (62).[150] Despite this exaggeration that necessarily entails an oversimplification of Butler's argument, the criticism of the subject's forgetfulness of its own history is well taken. The dimension of anticipation is articulated by Lois McNay in *Gender and Agency*, where she argues for understanding agency as "an act of temporalization where the subject transcends the present through actions that have an inherently anticipatory structure" (46). It would be inexact, however, to contend that Butler's theory is unable to explain this transcending the present moment as a structure of action *and* of the subject that is not only directed towards the not-yet—as McNay states it—but also towards the no-more. The problem in Butler is that the structure of action is not linked back consequently to the question of what it means for the subject who comes to make use of "its" agency. Acting or at least forming an intention, deciding to act, coming to a conclusion that one wants to do this rather than that, establishing a reflective relation towards one's desires and one's environment—this always means an inscription of one's conscious as well as unconscious histories, values, and goals into these acts.

The ability to deliberate and decide is especially important for political action, but it would be reductive to contend that "agency is always and *only* a political prerogative" ("Contingent Foundations" 45, my emphasis). One desires and thus desires to do something and, in acting, inscribes oneself in one's actions; one's actions become an expression and constitution of oneself, because there is the possibility of a self-reflexive relation to oneself as one comes to perceive oneself through the actions ascribed to oneself in relation to one's desires. Agency thus functions as a mode of self-constitution that does not need to be political in any strong sense. Butler seems to have moved away from understanding agency as *merely* a political prerogative; in *Psychic Life of Power*, she explicitly deals with the notion of desiring to persist in one's own being (see *PL* 28-29) in relation to the social conditions of life. In her later essay "What Is Critique?" she inquires into the aspect of subject formation as a "burden of formation" that is negotiated at the intersection of social norms and ethical

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constrained but not determined in advance" (*ES* 139), which means that it is open and shifting in ways that cannot be predetermined.

demands with regard to the notion of "arts of existence," understood as "a cultivated relation of the self to itself" ("What Is Critique?" 225). In her even more recent *Adorno Lectures,* she rearticulates the intertwinement between subject formation as an effect of the operation of norms and subject self-formation in relation to these norms. The reflexive relation that any subject can have to itself is always already constituted and traversed by these very norms in ways that are never fully knowable to the subject: "It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to appropriate norms, but it is another to say that there must be norms that prepare a place within the ontological field for a subject" (*AL* 22). On the one hand, a certain distance from norms is necessary, which requires at the same time that one comport oneself towards those norms. On the other hand, Butler reminds us of another kind of distance from these norms by which we are always already constituted, namely, the distance that occurs in my unknowingness of how precisely these norms structure me. But this distance, in the sense of my unknowingness, is at the same time also a lack of distance that continuously traverses my ability to emerge at a distance from those norms in a critical relation to them. As Patricia Purtschert argues, critique emerges as ethical practice in Butler's thinking as it emerges as a question of the subject's lived self-relation in relation to social norms.[151] The self-relation as lived then raises questions of what it means to experience and relate to this reflexive interiority, especially of oneself as living with others and over time, how it might be that one comes to have a material self-concept of oneself.

One thus emerges not only in relation to others and to norms, but also to oneself, which comes to figure as a relation to a self-concept, coming to understand and negotiate oneself as living with others, in a place, over time. This entails a dimension of projection, on the one hand, i.e., openness for the future and having/crafting an idea of oneself in the future, the anticipation and imagination of oneself. It also entails a dimension of retrospection, on the other hand, i.e., the capacity to craft a past and the necessity of carrying around a past, of being formed by past attachments, but also the conscious forming of those attachments. An account for the creative capacity needs to

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[150] Michael Levenson, "Speaking to Power: The Performances of Judith Butler," *Lingua Franca* Sept. 1998: 60-67.

[151] See Patricia Purtschert, "Macht der Kontingenz: Zu Judith Butlers Begriff der Kritik."

be situated, as does the question of how it is intertwined with the regulating forces, the subjectivation that works, in Butlerian terms, as an economy of passionate attachments.

6 Subject Formation, Self-concept, and Enacted Emplotment

Theorizing subject formation is not a theorizing for theorizing's sake, but it is an endeavor undertaken to think about becoming and being in the face of the experienced violence and impossibilities of becoming and being. Hence thinking about subject formation is inseparable from interrogating the conditions on which becoming and being depend and asking how violence of exclusion performs and how the conditions of subject formation can be ameliorated. The possibility of critical agency and political resistance that relies on the capability of the subjects not only to take a position and to act and reflect on it, but also to have an idea what it means for themselves to perform this or that particular action. Agency is not only of importance with regard to the possibility of political resistance and practical agency, but agency can be figured more broadly as responding and reacting in relating to others, to the world, to oneself. Our relations to others, our position in the world, our desires and feelings are not only far from transparent to us, but they are constitutively ambiguous and perhaps even only available to us, insofar as they disorient us, and demand and enable responses. We carry around and come to inhabit stories and histories explicitly and implicitly, and insofar as these stories and histories come to figure the horizon for our actions becoming an agent is inextricably bound up with the question of the formation of a self-concept. This means that if subject formation happens performatively and who one is and becomes depends on the actions that become one's own actions, this concept of performativity has to be specified and expanded because who one is and becomes then depends on the *meaning* of these actions in their context. This context is the emergent and constantly renegotiated concept of oneself as extended over time. The fabrication of self-consciousness thus has to be considered

with regard to how this dimension of this concept of oneself as oneself that becomes one's life is being crafted. This crafting as a fabrication of connections and meanings is the effort of the narration of a life, emplotment that renders a string of events a full story that is incessantly rent by ever new events and incident persistently and relentlessly assailing it. And this crafting is always already rent in ways more fundamentally and irrecuperably than that which I can ever consciously grasp.

The intention of these reconsiderations within the context of Butler's theory of subject formation is to account for how the subject does not merely emerge as self-reflexive, but as *self-reflectively* self-reflexive. The beginning point and motivation for this inquiry is importantly not the contention that one could not be responsible without having a self-concept, and it is even less the claim that one would need to have a fully coherent and transparent conception of who one came to be and what one's stories are. Rather the question is what it means that we do come to relate to ourselves, how we can perhaps understand self-concepts to emerge, how we might think the coming to inherit and inhabit stories and histories from the perspective of one's relation to oneself. Ricoeur offers one possible way of pursuing these questions by casting this emergence of a material self-concept as emplotment, which means that sequences of events come to figure—through exclusions, omissions, and reworkings—in certain constellations that make a plot. This story and plot that emerge are neither emerging in response to a demand of coherence and translucence nor are they ever controlled or consciously crafted by oneself. Rather one might desire and attempt to script who one is and who one is to become, but one is as it were always already dispossessed by one's own story that is beyond one's control not only because it depends on others, but also because of the trajectories of the unconscious. The task then becomes for us, as Butler importantly points out in her *Adorno Lectures*, not to demand full coherence and self-transparency, but the task also becomes for us to practice a kind of openness and critical responsiveness to those stories that come upon us as, sometimes strangely, ours. Attempting to understand how these stories might be understood in the formation of self-concepts might then help to understand how I might come to find myself entangled in stories that are mine and yet not mine, that I might wish not to be mine, but to which I find myself peculiarly passionately attached, attached without perhaps even able to avow it. Reworking these stories then is not a simple act of fabricating and imagining a new story, but involves critical labor that

will not only produce hope, but also fear and anxiety. Also this critical labor is always in certain ways undercut by the impossibility to emerge fully at a safe distance from these stories as well as from oneself, from one's relations to others and to norms which form and enable one's life. As self-concepts and one's entanglements with stories are structured by and orchestrated through the dynamics of relations with others and the operations of norms, demands, and ideals, reworking self-concepts and those relations to others and norms by which one comes to be who one is will always be a difficult and risky practice and task. And to mobilize resources to undertake this critical enterprise it is important to inquire into how these terms operate, how these formative processes work, what it means to speak of emplotment and stories of oneself. Ricoeur inquires into the formation of the self-concept in connection with the question of how to live well. For him this question of how to live well is driven by and bound to a fundamental desire to live well that can be specified and expanded as desire to live well with others in just institutions and that finds its limits in the ever present possibility of violence.[152] The focus in the following considerations will then center more specifically on the emergence of the subject as a self that is aware of itself as self and specifically as its *own* self.

6.1 Tracing Paul Ricoeur's Theory of Emplotment

In Foucault's later writings, the "self" emerges as a notion of a "reflexive interiority," which is very interesting alongside his contention that the self is not a given, but that selfhood is a creative process and that this process has to be understood

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[152] A question arising at this point is whether this desire is a universal desire. In what ways does positing such a desire delimit a culturally and historically specific horizon of subject formation? What kinds of lives cannot emerge as subjects then? Is the desire for just institutions, for a well-ordered society and state assumed as continuous throughout human history? Is it perhaps historical contingent insofar as we are finding ourselves in certain kinds of societies and states? Are desires for anarchical states ruled out as pathological desires? Perhaps we might come to understand the desire for security and certainty as fundamental, but this does not mean that one could deduce normative arguments from this situation. The question that follows then is the question what role these desires may play and how to attend to them. After all, we may very well come to value some desires precisely in keeping them unsatisfied, we might decide not to cater to certain desires although they will continue to structure and propel our being in this world.

as a "work of art."[153] The "self" is thus not to be understood as a substance and also not as a prior immediacy, but as a process of formation and stylization.[154] This formation is a process of interior reflection and at the same time a process of "intersubjective interaction," and this formative process with its two aspects always has a diachronic as well as synchronic dimension, or, put it another way, the synchronic situation is always a situation extended over time. Time, however, as lived time or human time, is fabricated, and only through this fabrication is it that we come up with some concept of "cosmological" or "astronomical" or "biological" time. The aspect of lived time is constitutive for the emergence of the subject as an individual, or, in other words, for the subject emerging as having a concept of oneself as oneself. This formation of a self-concept can be understood as embodied emplotment. But interrogating this idea in the context of thinking about Butler's theorizing of subject formation means that we will also have to hold present and attend to this process of emplotment as always already constitutively interrupted and disoriented in ways that are irrecoverable for the subject.

Emplotment (or *muthos*) is, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, "the combination of the incidents [*hē tōn pragmatōn sustasis*]" (50a15)[155] that transforms individual occurrences into meaningful events by working them into a larger context of a plot that is constantly emerging as the events are being organized. The dialectic here is that neither is the meaningful event preexistent to the plot nor is the plot as organizing idea preexistent to the meaningful events, but both are formed as one forms and informs the other. The self-concept as the story of one's life that one narrates as one's *own* story is orchestrated by the function of emplotment, which always is a conferral of intelligibility, rendering the contingent into a necessity and integrating it into a larger whole, namely the plot.

The function of emplotment has been theorized and examined in the three volumes of Paul Ricoeur's inquiry into the relation between time and narrative. He

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[153] See especially Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988), but also Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 229-252.

[154] Butler briefly engages with Foucault's notion of "arts of existence" in the final pages of her essay "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue."

[155] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater (New York: The Modern Library, 1954).

contends that emplotment mediates the "relationship between a lived experience where discordance rends concordance and an eminently verbal experience where concordance mends discordance" (*TN* 1:31).[156] Discordance and concordance are present at the heart of every figuration of experience in both its temporality and its interpretation. It would be to mistake Ricoeur at the very core of his argument to assume that emplotment is simply "interpretational violence" insofar as it functions by imposition of "narrative consonance ... on temporal dissonance" (*TN* 1:72). Emplotment is not the achievement of order, but rather the negotiation of the limits of concordance and thus the reflection on the dialectic of concordance and discordance. A plot for Ricoeur is never merely concordance but rather a "discordant concordance" (*TN* 1:42), and in the course of events discordance is constantly disrupting the flux of the story not only in the form of surprises and the unexpected incidents of life, but insofar as life itself is precisely not a story, it breaks into the story and continuously returns the subject of the story to life. These disruptions then effect a reworking of the story, and they themselves are not beyond the scope of becoming integrated and reworked towards consonance without ever completely losing their dissonant character. The question that seems to be not quite answered is whether absorbing dissonance and disruption into reflection does not eliminate their disturbance and obliterate their character of alterity by all too readily integrating them into a higher order of sense.[157] This issue is part of the question whether the argument for the subject's crafting a self-concept and being crafted as a self does not institute an

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[156] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983).

[157] At this point, a field for discussion opens up that could engage with Emmanuel Levinas and his considerations on alterity. Such a discussion would have to deal with the criticism leveled against Hegel that the other is always already incorporated and sublimated into the self, the same. The question then is whether the other can speak if the othering always means that the other is presupposed and predetermined in the same; the other then cannot really be other. One attempt to answer this question is to consider whether there could be the possibility of two kinds of other, the wholly other and the other with whom a relationship is possible. This, however, does not solve the problem of the sublimation of the other into the same from the beginning; furthermore, establishing two distinct modes of being other raises the question of how they relate to each other. The danger in positing some wholly other is that this then functions as something "beyond all signification" as a point of recourse and as an unchangeable ahistorical norm. To avoid this kind of othering, one might argue for understanding the "wholly other" as that in each of us that remains unsignifiable, that resists the totalization in the inauguration by interpellation and by turning on oneself, but that remains disturbing and undoing the subject. The danger here is that one could then happily impose one's values and norms on others, all too certain that there is this point of otherness in the other that will allow the other to resist and thus make the other responsible to resist and be other. A second danger is that in the face of the

arelational master-subject. Insofar, however, as the fabrication of a concordance that is incessantly discordant is understood in terms of producing a remainder that continuously disturbs the concordance and that escapes the totalization of absorption into reflection, the creation of discordant concordance is never simply at the subject's disposal. We can understand the irrecoverability of this discordance with Butler in Laplanchean terms of the overwhelmingness that irreconcilably disrupting the narrative and is itself not again narrativizable. But that which breaks and ruptures the narrative at the same time is precisely that which enables the narrating. Laplanche argues that events and encounters are not overwhelming, because they are meaningless, but because they have too much meaning. This meaning, however, is not available to me, therefore I am not only overwhelmed and called to interpret and to make meaning, but I find myself addressed, called to respond to something I could not possibly understand fully, I cannot possibly ever fully decipher. Yet because the events and encounters are suffused with the enigma of the other (that is in return again not fully transparent to the other herself), the problematic of understanding and responding adequately arises. From here it becomes possible to think about the intertwinement of responsibility and self-concept: The question how to respond well in the face of an other, as Butler performs in her *Adorno Lectures*, not only implies the questions "what do you need?" and "what do you want?" but in the face of the impossibility to know that traverses the scene of interaction the I comes to ask itself self-reflectively what and who it is becoming in this encounter: "Vainly I ask, "who are you?" and then, more soberly, "what have I become here?" And she asks those questions of me as well, from her own distance, and in ways I cannot precisely know or hear. This not-knowing draws upon a prior not-knowing, the not-knowing by which the subject is inaugurated, although that "not-knowing" is repeated and elaborated in the transference without precisely becoming a site to which I might return" (*AL* 71). Transference for Laplanche is bound up with the movement of translation and retranslation of the first translation that emerged as response to the primary impingement of too much otherness, too much meaning. At the same time through this translation that is always a closing off and distancing from this scene the I was

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just-argued danger, one starts being paternalistically protecting of the otherness of the other, forgetting that

established. Insofar as this closure is opened again and retranslations become necessary and possible, the question "who are you?" remains present as well as open. And if now the scene of the address also initiates a turning of the subject to itself, "more soberly," asking "what have I become here?" then this question seems to be precisely the point of departure for reflecting on the crafting and recrafting of a self-concept. And in this way one might read Laplanche's notion of translation as resonating with Ricoeur's inquiry into the formation of a self-concept through emplotment in a mode of a creative mimesis.

This crafting of a self-concept is, for Ricoeur, the poetic activity of mimesis. Mimesis does not mean that a copy of some original real-life event is fabricated in terms of a "representation" or "redoubling of presence" (*TN* 1:45). Mimesis rather emerges as "creative imitation" that constitutes the rupture that opens space for figuration and refiguration; mimesis is "the connection ... which establishes precisely the status of the 'metaphorical' transposition of the practical field by the muthos" (*TN* 1:46). This allows for a productive connection between Ricoeur's concept of mimesis as "creative imitation" and Butler's concept of mimesis as evoked in her concept of parody. Parody itself is introduced into Butler's argument by her interpretation of drag as gender parody that "reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin" (*GT* 175). The preeminent question for Butler is how identities become naturalized and instituted as "authentic," and parody here opens a possibility of interpreting this process. One could say the "original" is rendered original in a process of a double mimesis whereby the second mimetic duplication functions to disavow precisely the mimetic character. The avowed "copy" as *avowed* copy has to undergo a double mimesis just as well to be installed as a *copy*. The so-called copy, therefore, could not be a copy without the so-called original and the so-called original could not be original without the copy. Parody thus is a creative imitation that calls into question naturalization and so opens the space for recontextualization and resignification by perpetual displacement. The focus therefore is on parody as a stylization; gender, as Butler points out, then is to be seen as a "corporeal style" (*GT* 177). But this stylization is not an arbitrary enterprise that is

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there is that possibility enabled by the call to each one of us to resist, to practice the virtues of critique.

ever fully at my willful disposal, rather gender is a corporeal style insofar as gender has no existence apart from the ways in which it is inhabited and enacted. And my gender then is not apart from how it comes to animate me, how this body here comes to move and live and be intelligible to myself and others. Hence gender as *style* is not something that my body simply has as such, but gender then is only insofar as this body becomes intelligible and recognized through the citation and inhabiting of practices, norms, and codes of doing gender.

From here it is possible to extend Butler's concept of parody beyond gender identity and to draw a connection between her and Ricoeur. This requires interrogating and working out the *poetic* dimension of Ricoeur's concept of mimesis in terms of *poiesis* and the creativity that is already present in his concept of the threefold mimesis that constitutes the narrative arc. Mimesis$_1$ refers to the practical field where the narrative arc begins and to where all reflection must return; mimesis$_2$ is the creative field in which the configuration takes place; and mimesis$_3$ is the return to the practical field in an act of refiguration of the practical field that is influenced by the mimetic poiesis, which is the narrative structuring of life. The articulation of time in the narrative is the process in which it is becoming "human time"—experienced and meaningful time—and by which the narrative emerges as meaningful because "it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (*TN* 1:52).

The emplotment in the threefold mimetic movement is possible because there is a "preunderstanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character" (*TN* 1:54). This preunderstanding of the structures and norms governing meaningfulness depends on the subject's prior entanglement in this "world of action." This world can be understood as "discourse" by reformulating Ricoeur's argument for understanding meaningful action as text.[158] He lays out the structural analogy among discourse, text, and action to show that action as meaningful action is to be characterized as textuality. Regarding the formation of a self-concept in terms of emplotment, the concept of meaningful action as text is an important link because it elucidates the connection between action and text and explains why it is possible to interpret the emerging self—one that, as argued,

following Butler, emerges in and through action—as the story the subject comes to assume. Like an utterance, written or spoken, "action has the structure of a locutionary act" ("Meaningful Action" 204), since it carries noematic content. With regard to the "doer behind the deed," Ricoeur points out the parallel between text and action, since just as "text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author" ("Meaningful Action" 201), the agent is never fully author of his or her action with regard to the action's effects. It seems as if Butler could join Ricoeur in pointing out that "an action is detached from its agent and develops consequences of its own" ("Meaningful Action" 206). Action is rendered meaningful only over time and in a setting of praxis, where acting is a citational practice, a citing of prior actions. Thus, for an action to become meaningful, it is required that it transcends its initial context of occurrence, which in return depends on the openness of the meaning to reinterpretation.

But with regard to precisely this possible convergence of Butler and Ricoeur on this openness to interpretation and reinterpretation it becomes important to move cautiously and ask what the divergences might be. It seems to me that it might be helpful here to return to Laplanche and his notion of translation and look more closely at the earlier claim that there are certain parallels between translation and the hermeneutic understanding of interpretation and mimesis. In his essay "Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics: A Restatement of the Problem" in *Essays on Otherness* Laplanche himself expounds how he understands translation as distinguished from hermeneutics or creative interpretation precisely by its primary turn to the past, the turn to the other, the untranslatable that can only be reached by first detranslating the present translation. For Laplanche translating is a kind of metabolizing, which implies a breaking down of that which is received into its parts before they are transformed, and he suggests that in the same way "every authentic translation presupposes a detranslation, i.e. postulates that what is presented to it is already in some way a translation" (*Essays on Otherness* 160). The problem of creative imagination is identified by Laplanche not in the circumstance that "the interpretation notes that human facts always have 'a sense', but it adds *too quickly* that this sense is imposed on an inert datum by the individual" (*Essays on Otherness* 160;

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[158] Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Hermeneutics and*

my emphasis). The crucial distinction between translation and hermeneutic interpretation is constituted by attributing and inscribing sense into an "inert datum." Hermeneutics, in Laplanche's view, assumes that the human being is hit by events and situations of which it has to make sense, which means to overlook that these events and situations are never void of meaning in the first place. To start with the concept of translation means to affirm that the human being has to make sense and struggle to make sense of that which it encounters precisely because everything is always already infused with meanings that are not readily decipherable to the individual but through which it has to negotiate and can only partly negotiate. Therefore, to impose sense on that which one encounters thus means a distancing oneself from the strangeness in these encounters and by that from the other. Laplanche's concern, then, is that if this happens too quickly, one forecloses too early on the otherness of the other and lets oneself not be affected and traversed by the recurrent enigmatic address and demand of the other, which is enigmatic precisely because it is meaning coming from the other, but meaning as a demand that calls me to translate.

Consequently, translation is important for Laplanche insofar as it highlights the fact that at the core and in the beginning of each encounter, there is a message that is made sense of and not simply the "pure facts." Instead, facts always only reach the individual as messages precisely because they are already invested with meaning, but this meaning importantly is meaning suffused by unconscious meanings which are not only unavailable and overwhelming to the one addressed, but also the one through whose actions these meanings are conveyed cannot control or even fully know these meanings. This then does not mean that Laplanche is fully opposed to speaking of "interpretation"; in fact, he himself uses this term, but always in the sense that translation carries for him, and it appears to me that we need to keep Laplanche's intervention in mind when reading for how Ricoeur's inquiries can inform our thinking about the notion of self-concept in the context of Butler's thought.

Interpretation as translation neither means that a presently available meaning is superimposed on the material of the past and thus present interpretation fully constitutes the past, nor can interpretation mean the deterministic derivation of

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the Human Sciences, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 197-221.

meaning from that message that one received in the past. Rather interpretation as translation presents a rupture in understanding, an unfaithful leap which makes it impossible to establish a "linear causality" between the meanings one encounters in actions, texts, and discourse and the interpretation which one performs in responding to their addresses. Taking this Laplanchean perspective together with Butler's thinking on discursivity and subject formation, we can now reformulate Ricoeur, who understands the analogy between discourse and text and action as limited insofar as he sees discourse as restricted to the present situational context and its interlocutors. This limitation rests on the concept that discourse can be distinguished from language, which is the condition for the possibility of discourse insofar as language supplies the rules and codes that are actualized in discourse when communication takes place. Discourse refers to a particular world, whereas language as code lacks a world; "discourse is always realised temporally and in the present, whereas the language system is virtual and outside of time" ("Meaningful Action" 198). Furthermore, regarding subjectivity, Ricoeur argues that while language does not have a subject, discourse always "refers back to its speaker by means of a complex set of indicators" ("Meaningful Action" 198). The problem, however, is that language does not have an independent existence apart from its actualization. For the signifying rules and codes to persist as such, they need to signify, which means that they need to be used and applied. Hence, it is not that language is ahistorical and transcends the situation and that discourse is restricted to and delimited by its present-time occurrence, but discourse and language are inseparably intertwined and constituted through each other. At the same time as discourse and language are actualized, they are never fully present, but in their historicity, in carrying the trace of their own histories they transcend the present and, like action, beyond the interlocutors as well. This irreducibility between discourse and the subject has been emphasized by Foucault in his famous statement, "[D]iscourse is not life; its time is not yours" (72).[159] Despite this incommensurability, it is necessary also to see the productive and enabling operation of discourse since it is the entanglement in discourse that—as Butler,

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[159] Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 53-72.

critiquing Foucault, asserts—"*makes possible* the speaking time of the subject" (*ES* 28).

For Ricoeur, the preunderstanding of the world of action, or ability to identify action, that is necessary to represent practical understanding in narration is thus not a pregiven faculty of a preexisting subject, but is, just as the subject, enabled by the occasioning entanglement with this "world." This representing praxis in narration is the operation of mimesis$_1$, which requires and forms something more than an understanding of the "conceptual network" (*TN* 1:55-57) of action comprising concepts such as agent, motive, goal, means, etc. In this first step of emplotment, "discursive" or "syntactic features" (*TN* 1:56) are added to the understanding of the conceptual network. This means that action is interpreted with regard to the syntagmatic, diachronic dimension and to the paradigmatic, synchronic dimension of intersignification. Emplotment is the ordering of occurrences by stringing them together, assigning meaning to them, rendering them narrative events and actions. The semantics of action thus gains actuality and integration: actuality insofar as the concepts of a semantics of action pass from possibility to signify into effectivity "thanks to the sequential interconnection the plot confers on the agents, their deeds, and their sufferings" (*TN* 1:57) and integration insofar as the heterogeneity of possible agents, motives, aims, means, and situations are brought to compatibility with each other and one's concept of them. The narratability of human action owes itself to the fact that all human action is "always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms" (*TN* 1:57). This structuring of human action is what Ricoeur understands by symbolic mediation, which has a texture inherent to it that enables its becoming a text.[160]

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[160] That it is not a far-fetched idea to read together Ricoeur and Butler becomes clearer when one considers Ricoeur's comment on the meaning of understanding a ritual act: "To understand a ritual act is to situate it within a ritual, set within a cultic system, and by degrees within the whole set of conventions, beliefs, and institutions that make up the symbolic framework" (*TN* 1:58). This kind of understanding is not a merely cognitive activity, but it is a practicing and a learning to master the rules that govern signification (see *TN* 1:56). Precisely this idea has been argued by Butler in her discussion of Althusser in *Psychic Life of Power* in which she considers subject formation with regard to the necessity to learn how to communicate, to achieve mastery of the rules and signs governing communication, and to practice these skills. In comparison to Ricoeur, Butler focuses on the mode of this understanding and situating a ritual act as an action of embodiment and subjectivation, since the practicing of skills "is not simply to act according to a set of rules, but to embody rules in the course of action and to reproduce those rules in embodied rituals of action" (*PL* 119). Ricoeur, on the other hand, emphasizes the necessary contextuality and symbolic mediation of understanding an individual action. An action thus can be meaningful only due to its reference to and interwovenness with a symbolic network that makes it narratable and intelligible.

Intelligibility is for both Ricoeur and Butler dependent on signifying rules and norms, and action becomes intelligible as action only as "rule-governed behavior" (*TN* 1:58), which means that action "manners and customs" somewhat similar to the sense of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* (morality) function as horizon of intelligibility, but also as hermeneutic framework. The interesting aspect that emerges here as question then is how precisely intelligibility never is a neutral phenomenonality, a neutral appearing of something on the horizon of intelligibility, but how actions then operate through and always imply their own evaluability with regard to customs as well as moral norms. It seems that the characteristic of action as a symbolically mediated behavior binds action up with an evaluability that means that actions in interpretation are endowed with value that is not absolute but relative because of its dependency on the signifying norms that enable the emergence and signification of the respective action.

This evaluability is intertwined with an investment with meaning that renders an occurrence as action by virtue of the temporality that human action receives through its being governed by *Sorge* (care). *Sorge* is the structure of being-in-the-world, as Martin Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*.[161] This structure is inevitably temporal and, as such, is characterized by human *Innerzeitigkeit* (within-time-ness), which is derived from the experience that one always presupposes, counts on, and works with and within time. Heidegger, as Ricoeur explains, reserves the term *Zeitlichkeit* (temporality) for the experience that is "the dialectic of coming to be, having been, and making present" (*TN* 1:61) that constitutes the temporality of *Sorge* that springs from the human being-towards-death. Every action is inscribed in this horizon; action is directed and measured as "being-towards-death [that] imposes ... the primacy of the future over the present and the closure of this future by a limit internal to all anticipation and every project" (*TN* 1:61). *Geschichtlichkeit* (historicality) is then assigned to the experienced and anticipated extension of time between birth and death and thus shifts the accentuation from the future to the past as it is constituted by repetition, which is the re-presenting of that which has been in the interpretation that actualizes the semantics of action and confers intelligibility to agents, actions, motives, goals, etc. Mimesis$_1$ is the operation through which this representation of

action becomes possible, and it is formed by understanding of the semantics, the symbolic, and the temporality of human action.

Since this preunderstanding necessarily is already a figuration itself and depends on the investment of the conceptual and symbolic network with meaning, for these to signify and invest action with meaning in return, mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_2$ cannot be neatly separated. Mimesis$_2$, the "as-if" figuration, the operation in the laboratory of narrative fabrication, inscribes plot into the story and thus is the function of emplotment that mediates between the singular occurrences and the story as a whole as well as between the "heterogeneous factors" (*TN* 1:65) of agents, goals, motives, interactions, results, etc., by rendering the individual incident more than an individual action through ascription of significance for the whole of the story. In this process, the "episodic" and "configurational" dimensions, i.e., the diachronic and synchronic aspect of subject formation, are interwoven while remaining irreducible to each other.

The episodic function is the linear configuration of events as happening over the course of time. The configurational function establishes the causal link between the events that are instituted in a mere succession by reflecting on them with regard to the crafting of a plot or "telling line" for the story that gives meaning to the story as a whole. This act is necessary for coherence and for the subject to emerge as reflectively understanding itself as an extension over time, because "[t]o understand a story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story" (*TN* 1:67). The connection between the events that infers coherence is hence the narration that comes too late, as it always comes after the incident; it is only in the recounting that this coherence or concordance is possible at all. The intelligibility of the events and their relation to the whole depends on the conferral of a "sense of an ending" (Frank Kermode in *TN* 1:67) that is plausible and thus accepted as acceptable. This exposes the operation of emplotment as subject to norms and rules of intelligibility that determine what counts as plausible and acceptable and what does not.

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[161] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993). Citations in the text are taken from the English translation: *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SU of New York P, 1996).

Therefore, emplotment cannot be a conscious act of the subject, deciding how to integrate occurrences into the story that has been crafted so far throughout one's becoming by consciously reflecting on the norms and rules of intelligibility and on their demands regarding the interpretation of action. Rather, because the subject in its intelligible existence is inevitably dependent on the conferral of intelligibility and is passionately attached to this stylization according to the paradigm that will confer intelligibility, emplotment is not an operation that is readily at the subject's disposal. Certain actions, events, aims, etc., cannot take on certain meanings, cannot be integrated into the story in certain ways, because these very interpretations are not open to signification; they are foreclosed not only in the social but also in the psychic precisely because of the implication of the psychic in the social.

Understanding the configurational act in this way, not as separate from its own historicity and sociality and not as a deliberate act of an autonomous preexisting subject, can then help one to understand the configurational act as quasi-transcendental insofar as it is characterized by its being radically historically and socially conditioned and psychical operational. Thus when Ricoeur asserts that "[t]he productive imagination is not only rule-governed, but it constitutes the generative matrix of rules" (*TN* 1:68), in a Butlerian vein this expresses the dialectic of subjection that is the condition for the emergence of the subject in which the subjectivating norms and rules expose themselves as never merely curbing, subjecting, and prohibiting, but also as productive and generative regarding both the formation of the subject and the transformation of the norms and rules.

The temporal dimension of this dialectic of rule-governed formation and productive generation is the aspect of tradition implied here, understood as "constituted by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation" (*TN* 1:68). For the emerging subject, this means the subject as subject is always "coming too late" or, in other words, that its mode of existence is what Sigmund Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness) because of the retrospective activity through which action and experience are not only interpreted, but retroactively installed and inaugurated. This gap, which Agata Bielik-Robson calls the "rift between what happens and the

receptive capacity of the self" (72),[162] makes up the inevitable temporal structure of human life and constitutes the subject between remembering and anticipating, between past and future. Bielik-Robson reads together Derrida's notion of the gift and the psychoanalytic understanding of the relation between trauma and reparation. This trauma is instituted by the *Erleiden* (suffering, undergoing) of experience, the passivity of the subject in its encounter with the world. The traumatic experience is then "repaired" in the process of understanding the event. Bielik-Robson argues that meaning "is a perfect exchange gift to the world: it is returned suitably later, it is related to the original gift but, at the same time, it is not identical with it, for it carries a quality which is uniquely human and could only emerge out of the self" (87). This establishes a dialectic of *Widerfahren* (befalling) and *Sinngebung* (making sense, endowing with sense). *Widerfahren* is the aspect that constantly meets the subject unprepared and frustrates the subject's anticipation because future events and experiences are not fully predictable, while *Sinngebung* retroactively integrates the experience into the self-concept and concept of the world in a process of working-through. This working-through is the process that over time produces the "sedimented history," which is constantly renegotiated as a working-through new experiences that takes place and which is never fully at the subject's disposal. The sedimentation of a history that orchestrates the formation of the subject brings forth and consists of paradigms that then constitute the "typology of emplotment" (*TN* 1:68). The genesis of the story that emerges and the paradigms of emplotment, however, are constantly covered over and disavowed in this process (*TN* 1:68).

Innovation necessarily occurs in two ways in this process of crafting the story because "paradigms only constitute the grammar" for this process of emplotment (*TN* 1:69). Firstly, these paradigms emerge from the variety of different usages of them. Secondly, as a consequence, it is not only unforeseeable what paradigms will emerge, but there will also be a variety of different paradigms. To conclude, however, that this means an unlimited number of equally possible possibilities to narrate a story, to experience and to interpret experience, would be to mistake the dialectic between innovation and tradition and to forget about the dialectic between the conscious and

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[162] Agata Bielik-Robson, "Bad Timing: The Subject as a Work of Time," *Angelaki* 5.3 (2000): 71-91.

the unconscious. The dialectic of tradition and innovation is present in the practice of imagining, because "[i]magination remains a form of behavior governed by rules" (*TN* 1:69). Thus imagination is never fully free signification, but always a kind of resignification that is bound up with the context and the tradition that provides the semantic and pragmatic paradigms. At the same time, as Ricoeur points out, deviation is the rule and the "variety of applications ... makes a narrative tradition possible" (*TN* 1:70), because otherwise there could be only one single narrative. The dialectic of tradition and innovation links with Derrida's understanding of the performative relying on a break and deviation that enables the iterability of a sign by understanding a paradigm as a complex sign. The efficacy of a paradigm, i.e., its being used and applied to understanding and constituting experiences and events, thus depends on its iterability, which entails the paradigms non-identity and constant changing. Emplotment on the level of mimesis$_2$ thus inevitably is subject to constant resignification.

With the concept of resignification and necessary slippage, the dialectic of conscious and unconscious is already partly present. Ricoeur argues that mimesis$_2$ as the laboratory of fiction allows for a latitude of different interpretations that may vary from the "real life" narratives. Under the auspices of fiction, it becomes possible to test interpreting experiences differently, investing them with new meaning and restructuring the story. Such freedom becomes possible precisely because it is "just" fiction and not "real." But precisely at this point the dialectic between conscious and unconscious is of interest since it enables an inquiry into the limits of narrative self-constitution. The variety of possible fictional interpretations an experience can take is itself limited by those interpretations it cannot take, because they are foreclosed. The freedom of signification is restrained by that which has to remain unsignifiable. This restraint is not a merely negative one, since establishing the unsignifiable means establishing the constitutive outside without which the space for the relative free-play of signification could not be opened up. But what is it that constitutes this outside and continues to be present in the form of the trace or remainder that disrupts? What is this return of the repressed that tears the neatly woven narrative network and constantly necessitates renegotiation? The difficulty here is that one cannot simply demand that it ought to be possible for all narratives that are foreclosed through repression to become narratives, because if the I to which the narrative comes to refer is enabled only

through a certain foreclosure, then to demand full narrativization would mean to annihilate the possibility to narrate. In other words, if the pre-history of the I which constitutes the moment and propelling momentum of any narrative self-concept is radically non-narrativizable, then how could one even posit that all stories and histories ought to be possible to appear on the scene of narration? But insofar as this pre-history is constituted through foreclosures that are orchestrated by culturally specific and historically contingent norms, the predicament arises that there are very well narratives that cannot become narratives but under different circumstances could very well become narratives. The task then becomes not to render everything narratively available and conscious or to abolish all repression, but rather the task becomes to ask how we can render the operations of foreclosure and repression less static and unremitting. This means that we need to inquire how and where the renegotiation of narratives can happen and how renegotiations can be enabled by mobilizing the disruptions and disorientations of our narratives.

Ricoeur offers the renegotiation and refiguration as part of mimesis$_3$ that concerns the reconfiguration of the praxis. Here again it becomes obvious how closely intertwined the three mimetic movements are so that it becomes impossible to talk about one without already implying the other two. Mimesis$_3$ is characterized by the return of the fictionalized to praxis or, put it another way, by the translation of the fictional into action, thus leading to a refiguration of praxis. But this renegotiation is not a reducible to the dimension of a conscious decision, a willed project, rather one is always dispossessed by one's own fantasies and thoughts. And practical renegotiation of one's own self-concept and one's praxes happens through undergoing this very dispossession insofar as once one allowed oneself to imagine and think certain questions and ideas in a certain ways, one cannot make those questions and ideas simply unthought, they will—even as they might be necessarily be repressed again— refigure horizon of one's actions, invade and refigure one's practice significantly. This step of narrative being "restored to the time of action and suffering" (*TN* 1:70) is not merely an optional additional operation but a necessary component of narrative constitution. The meaning of the narrative bears full weight only in its actualization in praxis. The direction towards future action elucidates that emplotment as narrative self-constitution cannot be captured as a function of a remembering that is merely retrospective. Emplotment entails the imaginative power of anticipating; one emerges

as subject as one that has a concept of oneself with regard to future action and not only as one that makes sense of and thus identifies with "the one who I was in the past." This identification is a phantasmatic staging of coherence, because the position of "the one who I was" as such is an imaginary location.[163]

In this dimension of creative anticipation, we encounter the infinite lack of closure that is the ineffaceable openness and indeterminacy of subject formation. This aspect of non-closure not only stems from the inseparability of narrative emplotment with praxis and its directedness towards future acting and suffering, but non-closure is also retained due to the necessary "discordance," as Ricoeur puts it. Even though relative concordance and coherence springs from emplotment, this concordance is continuously disrupted by fortunes and events that are unforeseeable in their occurrence and effect. Although it may be possible to plan and anticipate, and although I might make a promise, which I can only make because I and the one to whom I make the promise are able to imagine an identificatory relation between the I who makes the promise now and the I in the future who will deliver the promised action, still changes and events might happen, might alter the situation completely so that my holding firm, my delivering on the promise, will be threatened or impossible. Also, there is the possibility that one simply fails to act as promised and this possibility of failure signifies the disruptive trace of non-closure and gestures towards the question of the limits of human responsibility.

The question of responsibility already indicates that it is impossible to separate the question of subject formation from the sphere of the ethical. This inseparability also owes itself to the fact that the meaningfulness of action for the emerging self with regard to one's self concept is intertwined with the action's interpretation and sensation in terms of happiness and unhappiness. And insofar as subject formation is not just cognitive but visceral enterprise, we have to consider the role of bodies and

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[163] At this point the question of pre-reflective knowledge seems to arise again, because obviously there seems to be an intimate relationship that makes my experiences and the "I in the past" the only ones available for me as positions with which to identify. Identification is thus not fully arbitrary, because the "mineness" of the position rules out the free identification with another position. The point here is not to call into question this limitation, but rather to assert it under the auspices of the turning that institutes reflexivity and thus retroactively also installs a moment of the "pre-reflexive."

desires and interrogate how desires and bodies come to figure in the conception of emplotment as narrative reflexive subject formation.[164]

6.2 Desires and Bodies in Enacted Emplotment

Desire is that which exposes emplotment as a visceral tropological movement—tropological insofar as one turns around to conceive oneself as oneself in the past and the future, and further tropological insofar as this turn is not merely reflexive because of the metonymic aspect in this turning. Emplotment inseparably bound up with desire cannot possibly be a merely cognitive, disembodied mental activity and thought experiment. The experience of lack and the compulsion to remember and to tell a story that provides an answer to the question "who am I?" is visceral because we cannot experience it separately from our bodies. The body is the site of our encountering the world, and through the body the world is mediated into our experience. The body is that which is always already signified and that where intelligibility is negotiated and contested.

Without desire, discourse—and hence narration and emplotment as well— would be impossible because of desire's diacritical differentiating operativeness, without which the plot would collapse into its "point." Desire thus cannot be understood as simply some internalization of a socially imposed requirement to "make sense of oneself" and have a concept of oneself, but desire also is the experience of longing to tell a story about oneself that answers the nagging and ever-open question of "who am I and who can I become?" Desire thus must be understood as the passionate

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[164] Desire and the body remain practically unconsidered in the three volumes of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative.* In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur discusses the question of the body with regard to the argument of the corporeal unity presented as a criterion of personal identity in the analytic tradition; he also offers considerably brief reflections on the body and the flesh with recourse to phenomenological works. Desire, however, is not explicitly reflected on at all. Instructive considerations on desire, however, can be found in an earlier work by Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (trans. Erazim V. Kohák. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1966). In *Fallible Man* (New York: Fordham UP, 1986), Ricoeur considers desire in its dimension of being feeling with regard to how human behavior is structured and incited by it. Human desire appears as divided into "movements" and "appetites" (*Fallible Man* 93), and concerning the question of subject formation, Ricoeur states that "only with *thūmos* ["the affectivity that

attachment to and so the psychic proliferation of the requirement to "make sense of oneself." In other words, the answer to the question "who am I and who can I become?" is the object of desire and it remains, as such, unreachable precisely because the totalizing effect of the narrated account fails, because there is a remainder that continues to be withdrawn from being captured in narration. This remainder, the trace of that which cannot be signified, continually disrupts the unity of the account of oneself; at the same time, it is this very remainder that enables an account of oneself, because it necessitates and spurs on the narration. That which cannot be narrated, which remains withdrawn from being remembered, thus signifies the constitutive outside of that which can be integrated and interpreted in crafting the answer to the "who?," and the economy of subject formation and self-emergence depends on the economy of desire that is sustained through the differential that is created through the dialectic of the narratable and unnarratable.

Emplotment as the function through which the subject emerges as one understanding itself as extended over time is shown necessary so that it would be possible for one to meaningfully intend to do Z and want to do Y. In Ricoeur's *Freedom and Nature*, intending and wanting are cast by Ricoeur as self-commitment and self-summoning to action, insofar as this means that "[p]rior to all reflection about the self which I project, the myself summons itself, it inserts itself into the plan of action to be done" (*FN* 59).[165] Such self-summoning cannot be separated from the limits that enable it in the first place, such as that an act of insertion or projection can never be a fully autonomous act.

For Ricoeur the projection of the myself that takes place through the anticipation of the action in the "I want." This wanting something is desiring, since it is "the experience of a present need as lack and as urge, extended by the representation of the absent object and by anticipation of pleasure" (*FN* 101). Desiring thus importantly

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makes up the transition between living and thinking," "the heart of humanity"] does desire assume the character of otherness and subjectivity that constitute a Self" (*Fallible Man* 107).

[165] It would be interesting to examine more closely whether Ricoeur differentiates between intending and wanting. It appears as if he does not really make a difference at this point; wanting is intentional insofar as it is object-related, and intending is not possible without a momentum of wanting. Especially since he flattens out the dimension of the unconscious (see also McNay, *Gender and Agency*) and wanting thus is inscribed on a level that is conscious to a very large extent, a difference between intending and wanting seems hard to maintain.

entails the capability to imagine the future pleasure that the fulfillment is supposed to bring, which means that to desire and to experience a lack as lack, one needs to have an idea of oneself as not lacking the absent object of desire. It is not of importance whether fulfillment will ever actually happen or whether a state prior to the now-experienced deprivation has ever existed. Also, the metonymic function of desire with regard to "original" *jouissance* does not conflict with the imaginatory function of desiring by which the time-structure inhering desiring surfaces. Ricoeur elucidates this anticipatory structure by the example of love: "Love anticipates union, desire seeks it and drives towards it; love is triumphant because desire is militant at first" (*FN* 263). The relation between voluntary action and desire hence is exposed as a reciprocal one. On the one hand, desire functions as inciting action by its visceral effect on the body, putting it in a state of tension that expresses itself as an inclination to act. On the other hand, the referring of desire to this willingness that turns into action is precisely what "gives it [desire] its intelligibility" (*FN* 267).

Despite this focused appearance of desire with regard to its intended object and the connected action, if one were to relegate desire to the form that is available to conscious reflective perception, this would mean proposing an impoverished understanding of desire and disavowing its unconscious economy. "Desire," as Butler contends in *Subjects of Desire*, "is ... the entirety of our spontaneous selves, the 'outburst' that we are, the upsurge that draws us toward the world and makes the world our object, the intentionality of the self" (*SD* 99). Desire then can be understood as the mode of encountering the world in which we are and which we make our object without denying that desire is always desire *of* something. The experience thus is one of activity and passivity at the same time, or rather one could say that in desire activity and passivity are mediated and transformed. The medium of this transformation, which is the medium of the encounter with the world in and through desire, is the body as one's own body. This opens a wide spectrum of questions regarding the experience of the body as other, as that which is seized by desire and passion, and at the same time as one's *own* body in that this seizure is a seizure of the whole self.

This dialectic of other and own or self regarding the body within the considerations on the triadic otherness that is constitutive in the becoming of oneself is discussed by Ricoeur in the final study in *Oneself as Another*, entitled "What Ontology in View?" Self-consciousness emerges only through being out of itself,

being *ek-static*, and through encountering the other as a desiring other. Ricoeur traces three aspects of otherness: firstly, the otherness of one's own body that—as *one's own*—is, in the wording of the phenomenological tradition, the flesh;[166] secondly, the otherness in the encounter with the other than the self found in intersubjectivity; and thirdly, the otherness of one's conscience (see *OA* 318).

Discussing the flesh, Ricoeur starts with three observations. First of all, drawing on the analytic contention that personal identity is bound up with persons being also bodies, he points out that it is necessary to consider not merely the connection between person and body, but the specific relation that "each person is *for himself his own* body" (*OA* 319; my emphasis).[167] Secondly, one acts with and through one's own body, and as far as human action is always an encounter with the world and constitutes itself in the world, the body is the place of human belonging to the world. Owing to the perception and ascription of this belonging, Ricoeur contends, "the self can place its mark on those events that are its actions" (*OA* 319). The limits of such a designation of the agent become clear when we ask for the designation of a collective agent, one that, for example, is made up from a multiplicity of bodies where only a few bodies might have viscerally acted, as in the case of a country, a public or private institution, etc. Also, the concept of the body as that through which an agent inscribes itself into an action becomes more and more problematic with regard to "disembodied discourses," such as in cyberdiscourse, for example, in which the speaker of a speech act becomes ever further removed from the act and mediated through virtual surfaces that efface the person behind the utterance. The apparent limitation of the inscription and agent designation that has been rehearsed so often, namely the fact that one's words and the time of discourse are never one's own, emphasizes the body as a place of inscription rather than undermining that argument. Precisely because words, signifying rules, hermeneutic patterns always extend beyond the speaking subject, it is through the embodied appropriation of these that they come to life and that the subject emerges as intelligible agent. This aspect of embodiment leads into the third aspect of the body that Ricoeur mentions, "the constancy of a self that finds its anchor in its

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[166] With regard to the body as flesh, it would be informative to engage with other phenomenologists' work, especially with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

own body" (*OA* 319). This constancy is enacted through "continuity of development, permanence of character, *habitus*, roles, and identifications" (*OA* 319).

Experience of otherness through and in corporeal passivity is described by Ricoeur in three ways. Firstly, "the body denotes resistance that gives way to effort" (*OA* 321), which is the experience of one's body as other to one's will through which the "mineness" of my body is established and perceived. Secondly, another degree of the body's passivity is denoted by the "coming and going of capricious humors—impressions of content or discontent" (*OA* 321), passion ravishing the body that inscribes passivity as an experience of foreignness. Finally, the third level of passivity is found in the resistance of the things in the world whose externality becomes perceivable through the extension of our effort in active, corporeal touch that encounters resistance. This encounter of resistance, this experience of passivity, is what attests to the external existence of the world and at the same time to the existence of the body as one's own. The flesh, the body one perceives as one's own, is thus "revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world" (*OA* 322).

The idea of passivity and resistance connects with Butler's discussion of the body as a site of contestation, bringing the intensity and often the ferociousness of the visceral aspect of one's being and becoming to the fore, which Ricoeur's account seems to even out. This flattening appears to result from the fact that for Ricoeur desire remains rather unconsidered in *Oneself as Another* as well as in *Time and Narrative*, especially in his discussion of the relation of the self and one's body. It appears to me that this is also the reason why in Ricoeur's account, gender, sex, sexuality, as well as race, class, and age, could be completely obliterated as categories and structures through which the subject as a self is formed and by which these categories and structures are formed and transformed as in the process of subject formation. In Butler, in contrast, the complexity of the workings of desire in subject formation is core to her theory.

The intricacy of the desire to subject the body is discussed in Butler's reading of Hegel's unhappy consciousness in her *The Psychic Life of Power*. The bodily desires

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[167] Just as do Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, Althusser, Levinas, and Foucault, Ricoeur also refers to the

well up and the subject is forced to recognize itself as a desiring being and its desires as its own, but it cannot accept them, and hence cannot accept its body in this form and this mode. Thus, the unhappy consciousness turns against its body to punish it in order to purify it or, in other words, in order to form and stylize it to meet certain standards. The inability to accept one's own bodily desires and needs as one's own is not simply an internalization of social norms, but it is also an attachment to subjection to those norms because subjecting one's body due to these desires then becomes the possibility to preserve the body and these desires. Simply acknowledging the body as other, experienced as other through its being seized by needs and desires, hence runs the danger of flattening this experience by casting it as the human condition and so obliterating the norms and structures along which desires arise, are formed and sanctioned, by separating it from discourse on subject formation. At the same time, the body and its resistance cannot be romanticized and superelevated as a genuine locus of resistance, because the body and its self-will (*Eigensinn*) is not independent of the norms regulating the social, as if only the psychic—or even only the conscious subject—would impose the social norms upon the body. Rather, the body's self-will is implicated in these signifying economies as well and is complicit in subjection and formation, just as the psyche has been exposed to be complicit in subjection. The nexus between social injunctions and the body's self-will lies in the unconscious as structuring and mediating agency.

With regard to the question of how the social becomes psychic, however, the focus indeed has to rest on embodiment, because embodiment is the process through which the inversions of power and desire become psychic and physical reality through the othering of the body and through the laboring on the body to rid it of its otherness. This activity of forming and stylizing the bodily self is not an activity that is fully free and unbound, because the desire to form the body arises in the first place from experiencing it as not fitting the norm.[168] This does not mean that desires present to us

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subject unquestionably as a masculine subject.

[168] I am aware of a mixed use of "norm" and "normativity" in my own narrative. Norm, on the one hand, denotes that which is a social standard, what is perceived and instituted as normal. On the other hand, norm and normativity also belong to the language-game of moral reasoning and of the reflective discourse on moral judgments, in which norms differentiate between the allowed and forbidden, inferring moral value. It might seem to some that I am not differentiating sufficiently, and I would agree with them. However, I believe that these two uses are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to reflect on them separately,

a voice of authenticity speaking from "beyond normalization" or that there were an authenticity of the body that is untainted by norms. But the very experience of the existence of that which "does not quite fit" calls the universality of the norm into question, presents the point where the norms own fragility comes into view, and thus offers the chance for interrogation and critical inquiry. Subject formation always takes place as a social and psychic process, and thus self-stylization entails and presupposes a set of ideals and norms according to which and through which formation takes place. The body then is the materializing effect of the subjecting activity that renders the body intelligible; the body, which as body always is gendered and sexed,[169] is, as a

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precisely because they cannot be neatly delimited against each other. Discourses on normativity and normative force always already function in a normalizing way, and practical norms always already entail hidden discourses on normativity.

[169] As noted before, the body is also always raced, aged, classed, and it would be necessary to enter into a more sophisticated and expansive discussion to question the privileging of the categories of gender and sex. Butler's own focus is on these latter modes of existence, despite her engagement with questions of race at some points; see, for example, the chapter "Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge" in *Bodies That Matter* and her interview with Vikki Bell in *Theory, Culture, and Society*. It appears legitimate with regard to the motivation and direction of this piece to only mention the necessity of broader examination. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this work to enter into an in-depth discussion of Butler's inquiry into the significatory connection among sex, gender, and sexuality. Sexuality does seem to play an important role in signification precisely because of the part *desire* plays—but it would be to misunderstand the argument of Foucault and the Foucaultian-minded to overlook the nexus among power, desire, and sexuality; it is not "just" sexualized power or desire that then is sexually invested, but the contention is that it always already is bound up with libidinal desire. The criticism often raised against this contention is "Why does it always have to come down to sexuality? What is this sex-obsession?" These questions are countered by the contention that it is not the purpose to argue reducibility to sexuality, but to expose the interconnectedness, sexuality so to speak as a material form of interconnection and to raise the question of how we come to know and negotiate the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Furthermore, the question that seems to come up here is why there is such an enormous reluctance to open up the discourse on sexuality and reformulate it. Together with this question, it becomes possible to ask why, on the other hand, is there this incredible focus on sexuality? Which are the formative impulses and influences that shape this discourse and the strong feelings of its participants towards it? If sexuality need not be spoken about, then it cannot be challenged, it need not "speak its name." Class, age, gender, and race intersect with sexuality; the power that makes these significations so effective and that is constituted through these significations depends on this very intertwinement among class, gender, race, and age with sexuality. It is peculiar that sexuality appears as such an unruly and yet so highly rule-governed phenomenon, determining to such a great extent rules of interaction in our relationships, pervasively structuring our codes of conduct. And often when sexuality is discussed, it happens in medical and technical terms (for example, the discussion a few years ago about Viagra, or the present debate about technically assisted reproduction), not in terms of a discussion about relationships, but instead when all kinds of medical indications and language are deployed it seems as if one were reading about some sort of a sports contest, "higher, faster, better." This is rather similar to Foucault's arguments about sex as medical discourse. Or one could think about the debate on abortion, genetic testing, etc., in which the focus in public debates is on the medical and juridical questions; even the ethical implications are discussed mainly from this angle. Here groundbreaking work that has tried to broaden perspectives has been done by some scholars with an interest in gender studies. Another example is the struggle over the recent change in German law granting same-sex partnerships the status of civil unions and thus some of the rights of married couples; disregarding the question whether such a move is indeed helpful in the struggle against the social impossibility of certain lives, the interesting fact about the German discussion was that "homosexuals" were not opposed to "heterosexuals," but to "married couples" and "families." The kinship relations are thus not functioning outside sexual norms; they are governed and

sexed and gendered body, an effect of the process of enacted signification. This signification occurs from the beginning on, with the answer to the question "What is it?" prior to or at the birth of a child. The choices to answer that question are "It's a girl" or "It's a boy"—the answer, e.g., "It's a German" would seem inappropriate—and from that point on, the sexing/gendering takes place. It is impossible not to identify with a sex position; the identification is compelled, but at the same time this position can never be fully approximated. The reason for this failure is that identification is the phantasmatic staging of the approximation; that which is to be assumed, however, is imaginary and thus cannot be fully assumed. Rather than understanding the sexing of the body and the subject as an act of marking the body for all time once the sexing has been performed, the assumption of sex is to be seen as citational practice, an interpretative enactment of the signifying norms and practices that render a subject being interpellated as "woman" or "man" again and again. "Being a man" or "being a woman" is an unstable practice that can never be fully achieved, and as taking up a gender is an identificatory practice that is expressed in the embodiment of certain sets of norms, such identification is accomplished only at the cost of the loss of certain other possible identifications. And perhaps we have to ask even further with regard to this binary of man/woman: Is there any life at all that fits into this binary? What is this attachment to being able to distinguish again so quickly between "the majority for who this 'description' is fitting quite well" and "that minority for who it doesn't really work"? What kind of distancing and silencing does such a gesture imply? "Doing gender" is not a matter of choosing a certain set of norms which one would like to approximate. There is no opting out of the compulsion to approximate a set of norms that one does not choose, but by which one is chosen, yet in reiterating the norms, full approximation remains impossible and thus the totalizing aim necessarily fails; this compulsion to reiterate is precisely the enabling condition for reappropriating and recasting the norms.

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regulated quite strictly by them—which is not to say that kinship relations are reducible to sexual norms. But it is striking that the relations are sanctioned by foreclosed sexual relations—children and parents, brothers and sisters; sexual desire between them is ruled as perversion. Modern techniques of reproduction redefine our conceptions, because nowadays sex, reproduction, and romantic love can occur separated, and seemingly independent, from each other. Thus, it becomes possible and necessary to rethink our concepts of kinship in new ways, as kinship can no longer be exclusively defined via the naturalization of biological necessity.

Embodiment—as Butler performs it in her texts—comes to be the materializing effect of subject formation, and this process as a signifying practice that orchestrates the making sense of the body can now be linked back with the Ricoeurian idea of emplotment. Emplotment in this light then is not the seemingly disembodied cognitive activity of a subject, but emplotment then becomes an enactment of a story that has as its materializing effect that which it is said to grasp, namely the subject. The formation of self and body thus is inseparably intertwined as I come to be only in relation to my relations with others and only in relation to the norms by which I am subjected.

Owing to its inseparability from praxis, narrative reflective emergence of a concept of oneself as extended over time is not merely a neutral mode of existence that is stating the primacy of the ontological over the ethical, but the ethical is already implicated in this mode of existence as becoming. The ethical dimension is implicated precisely because there is at the same time the question of meaning and action. Action becomes intelligible as it is invested with meaning, and in this configurational operation, the agent, the "who," of the action emerges simultaneously with the understanding of motives, results, means, and impediments. The meaning of action, however, depends on its telos, its leading to happiness or unhappiness in its outcome with regard to its effect on the agent that is constituted through the action. Thus subject formation, owing to this surplus of meaning, can never be pre-ethical or function independently of questions of ethics, because it is already configured by and in return configures the ethical.[170] This ethical openness is not an openness in terms of an isolated desire of an isolated subject for the "good life," precisely because the subject is always implicated in the social and hence conceptions of becoming as flourishing depend on the relationship with others and on social norms and regulations that orchestrate ascription of meaning and investment with value by controlling what evaluated and experienced as "good," "satisfying," "fulfilling," and "meaningful."

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[170] For an incisive discussion of the self-concept as "moral identity" with regard to narrative mediation, see Hille Haker, *Moralische Identität: Literarische Lebensgeschichten als Medium ethischer Reflexion—Mit einer Interpretation der Jahrestage von Uwe Johnson* (Tübingen: Francke, 1998). To inquire further into how a theory of ethics could be formulated more explicitly in the context of incessant subject formation that is cast as a performatively orchestrated process, it would be interesting to examine the concept of an experiential ethics as proposed by Dietmar Mieth in his *Moral und Erfahrung II: Entfaltung einer theologisch-ethischen Hermeneutik* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1998).

Therefore, theorizing subject formation as entailing enacted emplotment as the fabrication of oneself as oneself by becoming aware of and coming to terms with one's own story does not necessarily mean to reinstitute a subject that is in charge of itself and has control over its own becoming; nevertheless, the concern remains justified and needs to be taken seriously as a critical point of discernment to which the account of enacted emplotment has to respond.

6.3   Re-Enacting the "Arelational Master-Subject"?

It might now seem that in the end with a theory of enacted emplotment we are reinstituting a subject that is relational and traversed by its desires, but this relationality and disorientation is managed by the subject that is dependent but seems to emerge fairly swiftly as master of its own situation. But that this impression is possible means that we might have to think more about to the subjects relation to its own being dispossessed by its own becoming. This dispossession is fundamental and fundamentally, irrecoverably, and continuously disorienting in various ways. In order to attend to these disorientations and dispossessions that overwhelm us, but without which no life would be possible, we need to attend to the role of the unconscious, of forgetting, and of the hermeneutic paradigms that are constituted by and operate through the effectiveness of the signifying norms, with regard to the intrasubjective reflective dimension as well as with regard to the intersubjective interactive dimension. We might then be able to understand imaginative remembering as a power differential rather than as its "belonging" to individuals in the sense of an individual preceding the imagining and remembering and having control over it; imaginative remembering is exposed instead as inseparably bound up with human potentiality, which can also be expressed as the human "being entangled in stories" (in Geschichten verstrickt sein).[171] One is entangled in stories and only emerges from these stories in the process of the stories' emergence. This emergence is the self-

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[171] Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt: Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding* (Wiesbaden: B. Heymann, 1976).

constitution of the story in the horizon of the now in a movement of breaking open or unfolding (Schapp 112-114).

The main worry, form a deconstructive position, is that the subject is theoretically set up as in charge of its own narrative constitution and that the norms and rules governing this constitution then reappear as being at the subject's disposal, while it is only half-heartedly acknowledged that the subject is formed only in being subjected to regulating norms and desires that are far removed from easily conscious access. This worry is only partly dispelled by authors like Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson, who argue for a concept of narrative and social construction of identity,[172] or Seyla Benhabib, who calls for "narrativity" as a central concept in subject formation, because "performativity" remains inept to account for subjects as agents.[173] Benhabib argues against Charles Taylor and his concept of "strong evaluative commitments" through which self-identity is orchestrated over time by suggesting the need to capture "identity of the self in time ... in terms of an ability to make sense, to render coherent, meaningful, and viable for oneself one's shifting commitments as well as attachments" (Benhabib 347).[174] This perspective leads to a heralding of the ability to craft a life-story that makes sense to oneself from the fragments and narratives available as the subject's agency, which is relativized by the reservation that "[c]ertainly, the codes of established narratives in various cultures define our capacity

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[172] Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson, "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity," *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig C. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994) 37-99.

[173] Seyla Benhabib, "Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation," *The Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24 (1999): 335-361.

[174] There is a question about Benhabib's interpretation and refutation of Taylor's "strong evaluative commitments" on the grounds of taking them as being too rigid and leaving not enough room for the preliminariness of one's "shifting commitments." However, it seems uncertain whether Benhabib's criticism really applies to Taylor and whether the concept of "strong evaluative commitments" is to be rejected so readily. If one understands these commitments in analogy to Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment, then the "strong" has to be understood as strong in terms of the subject's experiencing a certain situation in a certain way being compelling for the subject, or "normative" for the subject, insofar as the subject cannot simply refute its own experience or make it easily forgotten. "Strong," then, implies the strength of the attachment to a certain subjective commitment, and taking into account the difficulty and effort involved in working-through and changing attachments, it seems not helpful to rush to "shifting" commitments too quickly. Furthermore, the dimension that these commitments entail an evaluation seems to be a phenomenologically appropriate description. However, not doing away too quickly with the phenomenon of "strong evaluative commitments" does not mean to advocate and herald them as that what is needed for the subject to become and for societal interaction to function well. The concept of "strong evaluative commitments" can be used as a tool for critique in order to inquire into our attachments and commitments and call into question the rush to judgment that forecloses the "in between" and holding out a bit longer to make it easier to loosen up attachments, make them more available to shifts and reevaluations.

to tell the story in very different ways; they limit our freedom to 'vary the code'" (Benhabib 344). Such a reservation, that the repertoire of available stories and ways to tell stories is figured in the contested space of the social and political, still presumes that there is a subject that has power over these codes, although this power is limited through cultural entrenchment. This limitation is undoubtedly the case, and the point an important one to make; nevertheless, it does not quite touch upon Butler's concerns. Her argument is that the subject is precisely not only limited by its being mired in the social, but *coming into existence* only through its subjection to the social.[175] What remains unquestioned when merely posing the subject as fundamentally capable of rendering itself coherent is what occasions this ability to make sense of oneself and why it is so necessary. The ability to weave a story of oneself corresponds with the compulsion to make sense of oneself, and it is this subjecting compulsion that is subjectivating. The compulsion occasions the subject that exceeds its occasioning while at the same time emerging passionately attached to that subjectivating compulsion.

This is not to say that this being compelled to enact a certain coherence is simply negative and oppressive and needs to be abolished, because it is not just an external coercive force to which one is being subjected and not simply a seduction by some outside power. Rather, one adheres to the compulsion because of the inaugurating traumatic experience of lack and because in every attempt to render coherent the remainder that is produced undoes the subject in the very moment of its production. The compulsion to make sense of oneself thus is a compulsion to reiterate this enacting one's self-concept over and again over time, and it is this necessity to reiterate that exposes the limits of the coherence and the limitation of the ability to render coherent. In her *Adorno Lectures* Butler offers a forceful critique of demanding

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[175] This further critical turn also has to be rendered present in Mieth's conception of ethics when he talks about the social and historical contingency of a subject's experiences, because these experiences depend on the "limitations of the scope of possible experiences by the process of socialization and by the implied patterns of social identity, by orientation towards the authority of the institutions that one respects, or by the conformity of the group to which one belongs" ("Begrenzung des Speilraums möglicher Erfahrungen durch den Sozialisationsprozeß und die damit gegebenen Muster sozialer Identität, durch die Orientierungen an der Autorität der Instanzen, oder an der Konformität der Gruppe, der man angehört" [my translation; Dietmar Mieth, *Moral und Erfahrung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1982) 113]). The important aspect that tends to be eliminated here is that the limitations *constitute* the subject and its experiences and that it cannot simply opt out of or easily shift from one pattern of social identity to another, from attachment to and orientation towards one authority to another, precisely because it is only *emerging* through and under them.

coherence and transparency from the subject by arguing how one depends on one's being constitutively traversed by a certain unknowingness that rends every attempt to become fully coherent, but that also constitutively enables one's emergence as oneself in relation to others. Butler argues not only that we cannot demand of others or of ourselves full coherence and utter self-transparency. Her argument also exposes how we might desire to contain und control the constitutive opacity of ourselves and our stories by simply shifting the problematic and demand that certainly however an incoherent coherence will have to be possible. Butler's critique proffers a way to return to this desire and interrupt the demand-structure not by demanding to do away with all demands, but by critiquing their ways of operating. The focus then is not only that the falling apart of ourselves and our stories is precisely that which also opens the possibility to refigure and rework the existing. But, perhaps even more importantly, the focus becomes the impossibility to anticipate and preemptively control and direct the moments and the ways in which this falling apart will happen. The task that emerges here at the metalevel of theorizing then becomes how to speak, think, and write the waiting, the openness for the arrival of the unanticipated, how to theorize into that anxiety and hope without foreclosing on either. The task for theory becomes to continuously return us to life and ask how we can perhaps to hold out a moment longer, how not to rush to reinscribe and reconstruct coherence—and be it a fragmented coherence. The task becomes to remain vigilant and become sensitive to the unforeseeable ways in which we are disoriented and dispossessed and rather than rushing to patch up these breakages we might want to attempt to stay with them and attempt to ask and imagine what the new, unthought of possibilities might be that become possible in the moment of the breaking of the known. Refraining from attempting to rush into the future, carefully and thoughtfully attending to the new that might emerge in undergoing disorientation, might then reorient us to the other and enable new possibilities of encountering others.

Encountering others, being related to others is constitutive to subject formation and this relationality even is constitutive in ways that precede the subject's emergence. Regarding subject formation in its dimension as narrative emergence then originates from, but also produces and transforms the relation with others. Subject formation in terms of its narrative dimension can be cast as a triple-dialectic, the dialectic of the trajectories of the intrasubjective and intersubjective that are

intertwined with the dialectic of the diachronic and synchronic and with the dialectic of the unconscious and conscious. Only through constant turning on oneself and being interpellated can the differentiation between interiority and exteriority be sustained and be always transformed in that act of sustaining it. This means that these two dimensions, those of the intrasubjective and intersubjective, are not already there as two distinct spheres that are interrelated and between which a mediation takes place, but that through the action that happens in these, namely self-reflexive reflection and interaction with others, they are constituted. This dialectic only operates in the mode of the dialectic of the diachronic momentum and the synchronic momentum. The synchronic momentum is the obvious interconstitution between the intrasubjective reflection and the intersubjective interaction and thus the labor of mediating the self-concepts, roles, and requirements formed in and through both of these movements. The diachronic momentum is the constant labor of remembering and reworking over time, the labor of rendering incoherence coherent.

Not only does this happen intrasubjectively, in the story one comes to tell about oneself in necessary relation to the stories one cannot come to tell about oneself, but in extension over time it is always both the memory that is inaugurated through self-reflexivity and self-consciousness and the memory that is established through intersubjectivity, namely the memory of the others. It is the latter that will be a regulating agency, as rigid as the intrasubjective, the psychic, since it is intersubjectivity that regulates certain enactments by connecting some and disconnecting other enactments by interpretation and inference of meaning and coherence. This hermeneutic principle is called the principle of charity or humanity[176] and is responsible for our interpretation of the (self)performances of others. The

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[176] The principle of interpretation says that subjects are always rationalized so that actions and behavior make sense with regard to the inferred mental states. This principle goes back to Donald Davidson (see *Essays on Actions and Events* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980]) and Daniel Dennett (*The Intentional Stance* [Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1987]). Simon Blackburn argues in his book *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998) that the principle of charity is an a priori principle of interpretation (API), because it appears that "[a] creature which appears not do so is either a creature that we have misinterpreted, or a creature that has no mental states, but merely exhibits movements" (55). The problem that arises due to positing the principle of charity as an a priori principle is that then the rationality of creatures is analytic, and thus there is no room left for irrationality. In a modified version of Blackburn, it would be possible to think the possibility of irrational behavior while the principle of charity remains analytic. One would then say that the conclusion that some behavior is to be assigned the predicate irrational is precisely a rationalization that makes sense of someone's behavior according to the API.

foundation of this principle is that we always try to make sense of the others' performances with regard to their psychic states, and if two performances, for example, seem to be incoherent, we make an additive assumption about the person's psychic actions so that the two performances can be held together as making sense.[177]

The subject formed and forming itself as itself as emplaced and extended over time is an enacted narrative, but always exceeds that narrative. To become intelligible people, we face the task of achieving a self-concept. Others always "read a story" into us, and the task is to mediate the story we come to tell about ourselves and the story others come to tell about us. The story that is told about ourselves exceeds us. It is the time of the narrative that enables the subject, but neither time nor narrative is the subject's. Even the story I come to tell about myself exceeds me insofar as it is my coming to terms with the stories about me that have been assigned to me, that others have told about me, and it exceeds me with regard to the Freudian dictum that "the ego is not master in its own house" (143),[178] since I am subject to my experiences, my memories, my wishes, my passions, and my desires as they well up. Thus, the decision of what needs to be negotiated is beyond my determination and I even cannot ever fully know what I am negotiating. Here the third dialectical relation, the dialectic of unconscious and conscious, comes in, since that which is narrated and rendered coherent is determined by that which cannot be narrated and has to remain beyond the scope of narratability as its constitutive outside.

To maintain a workable self-concept, the life-story must be retold again and again and, in fact, retold anew every time. But this crafting of this story is never completely

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[177] An example for how the principle of charity works in intersubjective settings is when person A on Tuesday says to me she loves place P and person A on Thursday then says to me she hates place P. These two performances at first are incoherent and contradictory, but one usually will not have a problem accepting that person A acted as she did. What we do in such instances is that we make another assumption, such as perhaps on Wednesday she was mugged in place P, or maybe on Wednesday she met much-disliked person Z in place P, or maybe she always loved place P because she was in love with person X who lives in P, but now she may avowedly or disavowedly have come to the conclusion that because her love was unrequited she will have to abandon the idea of being in love with X, and to work through that she has to avoid place P, and to do so she tells me that she hates place P. And if we cannot come up with an additional assumption at hand, the last interpretative move always is that person A acted irrationally, which does not remove the fact that the intersubjective interpretation of A's enactments regulated them and thus regulate A's possibilities of enacting intelligibly/being taken seriously. In addition, this makes clear how intersubjective performance and intrasubjective interpretation are connected, since it is from what is perceived and constructed as another person's story and from their interactions with others that conclusions of their intrapsychic processes are drawn.

arbitrary and free; rather, it is via the repetition of certain interpretations and symbolic significations, which encode meaning, that a certain stability is produced, which is inevitably discursive and frail. The traces of memory restrict arbitrary signification and resignification; they restrict the number of plots, the variety of selves that can be invoked. This unstable self-concept is constantly disturbed by that which needs to be excluded from remembering. Remembering at its heart is forgetfulness;[179] it is an attempt to grasp that which is out of and beyond reach. It tries to re-present what no longer is present, and so tries to get hold of what remains out of the scope of what can be remembered, as, for example, one's childhood. One cannot ever fully represent and render present one's own origins, but the story always remains a fictional account; in the backread of what has been, the movement that remembering is; it always is a fictionalizing that constitutes the past as remembered. Yet it is beyond one's decision what we come to remember and what not and in which way the traces of the past are to be signified and integrated into the story. Memories surge up; they happen to one. One is seized by remembering; it has its own life. Memory therefore cannot be described as belonging to a subject or to a self or to a person. Memory is a differential, a mediation, something that happens to one when one walks into a house in which one used to live years ago, when one hears a story about someone one knows or used to know, when one sees a picture of oneself.

Memory—as that which cannot be remembered, not only because it cannot be re-presented because we have never "had" it, but also as that which has to be "made forgotten," as that which is remembered as that which "has never happened"—haunts us. Because signification of the traces of the past is never totally consuming the traces, but rather proliferates the trace, so the past and the memory as such escapes the words that are to capture it. In other words, a remainder is produced, and this remainder is what constantly undoes the subject. The unconscious is constitutive for remembering

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[178] "[D]ass das Ich nicht Herr sei in seinem eigenen Hause" (11). Sigmund Freud, Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse," *GW* 1-12; "A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis," *SE* 17:35-144.

[179] As Heidegger argues: "Just as expectation is possible only on the basis of awaiting, *remembering* is possible only one the basis of forgetting, *and not the other way around*. In the mode of forgottenness, having-been primarily 'discloses' the horizon in which Da-sein, lost in the 'superficiality' of what is taken care of, can remember" (*Being and Time* 312; the German original reads: "Wie die Erwartung erst auf dem Grunde des Gegenwärtigens möglich ist, so die *Erinnerung* auf dem Grunde des Vergessens *und nicht umgekehrt*; denn im Modus der Vergessenheit 'erschließt' die Gewesenheit primär den Horizont, in den hinein das an die 'Äußerlichkeit' des Besorgten verlorne Dasein sich erinnern kann" [339]).

because it is not the absolute outside of that which is rendered coherent and integrated in the account, but it is created in the process of rendering coherent that which has to be foreclosed, which cannot be signified. As the incoherence that cannot be avowed as incoherence and thus lack of coherence, the unconscious remains the condition of the possibility of the conscious, the remembering that produces coherence. This coherence is produced by the inference of certain sets of causal connection, which can only be inferred at the cost of disavowing other sets of causalities and connections. The phantasmatic character of this process has to be disavowed to a certain extent if the emergent self-concept is not to be a completely paralyzing one. The impossibility of certain significations and identifications is a disavowed impossibility, because avowing their possibility would call into question the necessity with which the coherent self emerges. The process of making forgotten that which has to be forgotten is precisely the double mimesis through which the subject is occasioned. Owing to the production of the remainder, however, this process is dependent on reiteration. This necessity of reiteration, however, is also precisely the breaking point of the "circle of bad memories" because iterability constitutively entails the moment of breakage and non-identity.

The subject that is occasioned in the process of enacted emplotment that is an imaginative remembering has been shown in the above considerations as one that is far from an arelational subject that is in control of itself and its self. It is the compulsion to make sense that conditions and limits the capability to make sense of oneself. This process is embedded in the double dialectic of the aspects of diachronic and synchronic and of intrasubjective and intersubjective subject formation, which are mutually constitutive insofar as they are mutually restrictive. The subject, rather than being in charge of its story, emerges in being subjected to its story, which enables the enunciation of the I in which the subject exceeds the occasion of its formation precisely through its limitation. The mode of existence thus never is one of consolidating self-certainty, but one of attestation,[180] intra- and intersubjective

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[180] With regard to the necessity of attestation in subject formation in addition to recognition, see Kelly Oliver's article "Beyond Recognition" (*Philosophy Today* 44.1 [2000]: 31-43) in which she argues that the relation with another subject who always withdraws from one's comprehension of this other is possible only in a mode "beyond recognition." This "beyond recognition" in Oliver's account is the condition of the possibility for an ethical relation and has to be an "acknowledging [of] the realness of another's life [that] is

attestation, that accounts for the subject's *Nachträglichkeit* and *Vorläufigkeit*, the "coming too late" and "remaining preliminary" that cast the subject as one that is constantly unbecoming in its becoming.

The process of being formed as and forming a reflective relation with oneself is not only governed by the dialectic of intrasubjective and intersubjective, but also by the dialectic of diachronic and synchronic as well as by the dialectic of unconscious and conscious. Imaginative remembering, then, is captured as a differential that constitutes human potentiality, rather than as a property inherent to a subject. The form of this human potentiality is that of always already being entangled in stories, but these stories are permanently only partially unfolded, and how they unfold in a given situation is never predeterminable. One is inevitably entangled in a plurality of stories in both directions, those of past and future, and neither past nor future is ever brought to the point of full closure. But the precariousness and factual possibility of closure always remains and reminds us of the never-ending task of vigilance.

The capacity to have a concept of oneself as an emplaced extension over time is the capacity to have a self-concept, and this capacity is not a capacity one can choose to use or not, but one that one always already is forced to apply insofar as one is always socially ascribed roles and traits. This ascription in fact is what inaugurates the subject, and this ascription and the negotiation of it are what one is passionately attached to because it means one's existence. My contention is that the ascription and self-ascription of roles and character traits are a process that carries a surplus of meaning with regard to a mere ascription of certain individual actions, because subject formation also necessarily depends on the formation of a self-concept. Otherwise, so my argument goes, without the emergence and negotiation of a self-concept, critical inquiry that is an existential practice, rather than the exercise of fault-finding, is

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not judging its worth, or conferring respecting, or understanding or recognizing it, but responding in a way that affirms response-ability or addressability" (41-42). Although Oliver argues against Butler—focusing on Butler's understanding subject formation as a "hostile struggle" and "subordination" that is "based on a logic of exclusion" (41)—in the intention of this suggestion for a reformulation of how an ethical relationship can be possible at all seems to be a place where Butler and Oliver could meet again. The kind of affirmation that Oliver calls "acknowledging the realness of another's life" could be productively linked with Ricoeur's argument for attestation as a witnessing to truth in which "the truth" remains ultimately unreachable and so provides a critical perspective on the question of what this "realness" means.

impossible.[181] A theory of subject formation that takes seriously necessary and constitutive entanglement has important consequences for the question of accountability and responsibility. The possibility of accountability and responsibility is not obliterated, since if subject formation does not yield subjects that are unable to perceive time as "lived time" and to perceive themselves as extended over time, the emerging subject necessarily comes to ascribe actions, as specific unfoldings of stories told to him/herself, as his/her own intentional and deliberate actions. Yet human responsibility and accountability will have to be much more understood from their limits, insofar as actions, stories, and histories as the founding condition of the subject always transcend the subject, and both subject and its conditions are historically contingent. Notions such as guilt, conscience, and forgiving have to be reconsidered in this light; perhaps the strange kind of giving that forgiving is can be approached as a kind of joint labor of mourning, as Ricoeur suggests,[182] which leads not to forgetfulness of what has happened, but which may transform the pain that sustains memory into the less painful remembering of remembered pain.[183]

7 No End to Subject Formation—No Mercy in Subject Formation?

Throughout the course of this inquiry, the subject has turned out to be continuously emerging, fragile, and passionately attached to its becoming. Becoming is not easy: it is being interpellated, addressed and being responsible to an other,

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[181] The practice or virtue of critique is bound up with ethical concepts in a highly intriguing way in Foucault, who in his later works understood ethics as the practice of freedom and fundamentally as a practice of relating to oneself and others, as he points out in his essay "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (Michel Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. P. Aranov and D. McGrawth [New York: The New Press, 1997] 281-301): "*Ethos* also implies a relationship with others, insofar as the care of the self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend" (287).

[182] See Paul Ricoeur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit*.

[183] On the possibilities and limitations of loss and mourning and the ethical and political implications see Butler's "Afterword: After Loss, What Then?" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* as well as the entirety of this volume more generally.

another person, being implicated in a web of social and moral norms, being turned and turning on oneself, becoming aware of oneself in the face of the other, in the face of norms and rules. Even for Levinas there seems to emerge a passionate attachment to becoming.[184] Yet the desire to live does not mean that living has a primordial right; rather, the right to live is radically put into question by the address and commandment that are issued by the face of the other that are more primordial than the I that could possibly invoke any rights. Levinas does not propose a desire to sacrifice one's life, rather there simply is no consciousness, no I prior to and apart from being called to respond to the other, without being responsible for the other. Hence, one does not first or primarily come into one's own and then comes to encounters others and extend oneself to others, but rather one is always already coming too late to the call of the other.[185] Bound to the inevitable responsibility, be it with regard to norms or other persons, the questions that kept reemerging and unpacifically nagging were and are the questions of violence and "primordial guilt" at the core of subject formation. Is it that emerging as a subject presupposes or is co-extensive with establishing a guilty subject? And, if so, what kind of guilt is this? What kind of violence is presupposed and reinscribed here? And with heightened exigency reemerges the question what kind of ethical theory such theorizing of subject formation comes to offer.

What ethics is there in view, if we are nothing other but guilty and always already too late? What has become of hope, of mercy, of forgiveness? Can ethics only emerge

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[184] Undergoing the sensibility and exposedness to the other is prior to what one could will, but there seems to be a mode of offering oneself possible and emergent. However, this offering oneself would not be an offering, Levinas suggests, if there were no enjoyment through which the intensity of the offering and giving away could be felt: "... the passivity of being-for-another ... is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat. But for this one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it. Enjoyment is an ineluctable moment of sensibility" (*OTB* 72). With enjoyment there is an attachment to one's life that emerges alongside with being affected by the other, but enjoyment does by no means suspend the responsibility for the other. Rather enjoyment and complacency seems to be that which always makes it possible to foreclose upon one's sensibility and exposedness toward the other: "Enjoyment in its ability to be complacent in itself ... is the condition of the for-the-other involved in sensibility, and in its vulnerability as an exposure to the other" (*OTB* 74).

[185] It would be interesting and important to inquire in what ways this generality operates. Being addressed comes to figure as constitutive for subject formation, and if this address is the relating of the commandment, the divine commandment "Thou shalt not kill"—implicated in specific traditions, then question becomes whether outside these traditions there is no subject formation or whether there might be other ways of becoming. Would subject formation still work through a mode of address? Are there other ways of being addressed? To ask how the generality Levinas' inquiries in subject formation works one would have to inquire into the role of Judaism in his thought offered as a kind of "Jewish universalism" and there into the

on the horizon of violence? And, if so, what violence is that? Has all violence by now been rendered indiscriminate? Is there a getting rid of violence, putting an end to all violence? What would it mean to interrupt the logics of violence? Are there in fact logics to violence? What is the nexus between violence and guilt? Theologies of grace might now find themselves called upon for their contribution and be found to have much to offer here. Clemency and leniency that help to bear the inescapable responsibility in the face of possible failure can only be granted by God's grace. Human responsibility is not canceled by the grace of God, even if we are always already in need of grace because as humans we are bound to fail.

The question arising here is whether theology's contribution to the discussion here really can be graceful comfort and encouragement through the offering of God's grace and forgiveness. Is in such a theology the greatness and glory of mercy and grace preached not bound up too closely with the unworthiness of the subject, ever and already guilty? Can this seeming relation of dependency be refuted successfully by positing and continuously affirming the ultimate independence of God and God's actions, while trying to offer a theology that does not remove God from the human, but instead attests to a God who entered daringly into a relationship with the human? If the human subject's pleasure in and attachment to its own renunciation and flagellation functions to prove the evil at the heart of the subject that then attests to the greatness of the grace granted to that subject by God, what kind of grace would this be? Would such a theology not invalidate itself if guilt and failure turned out to be constitutive in subject formation in the sense of being that which makes human life emerge as human?[186] Then a theology that frees and saves from failing and becoming guilty, failing, inflicting pain, and undergoing and experiencing painfully our exposedness to each other, such a theology would indeed foreclose and preclude us from becoming human. And yet there is the experience of and desire to end violence and suffering. We experience this world not as redeemed, and if redemption is to make sense, then perhaps it is only through the experience of its absence of in our

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operation of particularity as universality in a possibly non-exclusive way. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism,* trans. Seán Hand (London: Athlone, 1990).

[186] This move to inquire to what extent and in what ways every attempt to liberate does not also produce that from which it strives to liberate bears resemblance to Michel Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis and sexual liberation in *The History of Sexuality.*

world. But still the presence of violence and suffering cannot in any simple way be the *precondition* for theology, because would then theology not *require, ask for, and by this necessity justify* at least as its own precondition suffering and violence?

The epistemological underside of this ethical conundrum is the question of what it means to introduce God and theology at the point of the irresolvability of the paradox of becoming as the condition of the possibility of this irresolvability. This becomes a problem in the moment where this "condition of possibility" is introduced as enveloping this irresolvability, grounding this irresolvability (life, our being and becoming facing and never-facing each other, pain, death), and being involved with it. The problem here is the following: If becoming happens precisely because the painful paradox of becoming cannot be attenuated and if it is precisely this impossibility of a resolution that is the condition of possibility of human freedom and agency, then this theoretical move to introduce God and theology would mean precisely to eradicate human freedom and put an end to faith as a human act. In other words, while it would be convenient, God cannot emerge at the point where we need a theoretical guarantee of freedom, or human dignity, life, or justice. If theology is to be serious, then God cannot be the *ultima ratio* backdrop, but perhaps theology might emerge in the very precarious moment in which thinking faces the impossibility of offering guarantees.

Perhaps there is a moment when every kind of thought has to become theological and the danger is to become dogmatic, in the sense of adhering to and proffering dogmatism, and the challenge is to remain theological. But is theology then still "theological"—or, rather, what precisely does it then mean to do "theology"? Why would this kind of thinking not be able to be done by attempts to theorize ethics, history, and politics? What would it mean to ask for thinking the possibility of radical rupture and linking this kind of thinking to a kind that dares to inquire into the possibility of theology? Such a type of thinking would definitely have to wonder what precisely makes it theological, and—presuming that theology has something to do with religion, with faith, and with God—it would have to wonder what precisely God has to do with ethics and why theology is perhaps not simply reducible to ethics. This irreducibility, on the one hand, seems to be something that at least has been something that has its own history in the history of people living faith and, on the other hand, theology can only be irreducible to ethics if life cannot be simply reduced and returned to God.

Life cannot be reduced and returned to God, if there is to be freedom. And if there is to be life, theory has to fail to offer ultimate grounds. But this impossibility of arguing and theorizing ultimate grounds does not settle the question of faith and of theology, and this is one of the problematics at the core of Søren Kierkegaard's thought, taken up by Butler in her essay "Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair."[187] Butler emphasizes: "In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), Kierkegaard makes clear that he is not interested in proving rationally that God exists, but only in the question of how to achieve faith as it arises for the existing individual: How do I become a Christian, what relation can I have to faith?" ("Kierkegaard" 370). Kierkegaard does not simply argue the impossibility of such a proof or argue that there is nothing to be gained; rather, he—as speaking here for us through Butler, as Butler is ventriloquizing Kierkegaard—Kierkegaard claims not to be even interested in a rational proof of the existence of God. It seems that it does not matter to faith whether God actually exists. This does not mean that faith is founded on the impossibility of doubt or that for faith the question of God's existence is not allowed. Yet it seems that there is something in faith, a moment, a point where the question of God's existence loses its relevance. Faith is precisely not a question of philosophical deliberation and of being convinced by the best argument. But faith emerges at the limits of reason, at the existential limits of reasoning. Butler is offering us Kierkegaard as making us understand that even if one could prove God's existence, this proof would not render me a believer merely because I cannot refute God's existence.

Does faith then mean and perhaps even require anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism? There are two things going on here, two problems opening up. Firstly, faith as a kind of anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism seems not the most comforting of all ideas, because it seems to propose and advocate an attitude that seems to be uncritical, fundamentalist, impossible to be called into question, because it is beyond questioning and argument. Secondly, theological reflection would then be precisely that which flies in the face of faith, which might be read as a call for faith to refuse theology and thought in general in order to fully become itself. The question

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[187] Judith Butler, "Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair," *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert Solomon

that emerges here is the question of what relation faith and reason, religion, theology, and philosophy have. And perhaps every mode of thought is ironical in the very sense that Butler emphasizes the irony in Kierkegaard, which is that he is precisely *"writing on behalf of that which is beyond speculation, reflection, and language"* ("Kierkegaard" 363). Not only is it impossible for reflecting on and writing about faith to surpass the paradoxicality, but faith in itself is paradoxical as a mode of becoming, a mode of the self's emergence.

In order to think about faith as mode of the self's emergence, we need to ask how this self figures for Kierkegaard and how faith comes to operate in this process of subject formation. In her essay on Kierkegaard, Butler performs a close reading of the first passage of the main part in *Sickness Unto Death* to show how Kierkegaard parodies and works Hegel's terminology and logic to its breakage point. This point of breakage is for Kierkegaard the reality of the existing individual and the dynamic of this reality that cannot be reduced to an unfolding within history according to a logical principle; rather, the dynamic is one of leaps, breaks, and passion defying logic and rationality and propelling the individual as well as history. The self emerges as "a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself" (*SUD* 13).[188] Kierkegaard begins by offering the self as a relation, but this relation is not static; instead, it is characterized by its activity of relating, more specifically of relating to itself. The self thus is reflexive insofar as it relates to itself, bends back on itself, takes itself as object. But the self "is not the relation," Kierkegaard emphasizes; it emerges as that which accounts for the self-reflexive relation. To be a self, then, does not only mean to turn back on oneself, take oneself as an object of reflection, and thus have a relation to oneself. Rather, as Kierkegaard seems to indicate here, this self-relating is an incessant activity and hence being a self as a self-relating relation means that the self emerges now as relating to itself relating to itself. So I am not only becoming aware of myself as myself, but I am furthermore becoming aware of myself becoming aware of myself. The self is not only self-reflexive and self-reflective, but it

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and Kathleen Higgins (London: Routledge, 1993), 363-395.

[188] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death,* trans. Howard V. Hong and Enda H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

is self-reflectively self-reflexive and self-reflective. And even more so—and thus the self is infinite—there is no stopping point to this relating, to this reflecting. I think about myself, I think about myself thinking about myself, I can think about myself thinking about thinking about myself, I can think about myself thinking about thinking about thinking about myself, and even that is not the end, although my ability to think myself thinking is meeting its limits. I am stumbling; I can no longer clearly think the reflecting of the reflections. But the fact that this limit is dizzying and at the same time unsatisfying is indicative, because this I knows that this limit is precisely not the ultimate limit, not the end. This I as self is not completely translucent to itself; it has not gotten a comprehensive view and thought of itself relating to itself and has been launched into an infinity.

As such a relation, Kierkegaard concludes, the self must either have posited itself or have been posited by another (*SUD* 13)—this transition, as Butler points out, is not logical; in fact, it is precisely again and again at the point of transitions where Kierkegaard's argument is propelled by illogical leaps and breaks ("Kierkegaard" 367-369). These leaps pose as logical transitions, as Kierkegaard pretends to pick up precisely where the preceding paragraph has left off and offer the conclusion and logical development of the preceding proposition. But emergence is not a process of evolution; emergence is an unprecedented and incalculable coming into existence. The self's emergence can only be either one that is a self-constituting, a self-positing, or there has to be a relation to another that precedes the self-relating relation that has brought the self into existence. Kierkegaard seems to simply assume the latter and explains that this means that in every act of relating to itself the self is also relating to this other. And so the self is now presented as "a relation that relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself relates itself to another" (*SUD* 13-4). But the question is still open: why should the self not be the origin of its own emergence, and why is it dependent on another?

Kierkegaard tells us that the self has to have been posited, because otherwise there would only be one kind of despair possible: "If a human self had established itself, then there could be only one form: not to will to be oneself, to will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself" (*SUD* 14; quoted in "Kierkegaard" 372). If the self is its own source and origin, then it is with itself and fully itself; there is no possibility not to be oneself, because one is

always positing oneself and with oneself, and there is no way not to be oneself. The only possible despair, then, would be to desire not to be oneself, but since it is possible to desperately desire to be oneself, the self cannot possibly be its own *arche*, its own origin and principle (*SUD* 14). The despair here is that, desiring to be itself, the self cannot come to rest in and through itself, because it is dependent on the other that is responsible for its existence. Thus, the self always has to relate itself to this other in relating itself to itself. Butler expounds on this paradoxical situation in which every self is therefore caught: "Insofar as 'another' is infinite, and this prior infinity constitutes the self, the self partakes of infinity as well. But the self is also determined, embodied, and hence finite, which means that every particular self is both infinite and finite, and that it lives this paradox without resolution" ("Kierkegaard" 370). The infinite enters here as groundless ground, God for Kierkegaard, which cannot be grasped and mediated as an object of knowledge, because grasping and mediating mean to render finite. If the self were merely a relation and not also the activity of relating itself, then its situation would be paradoxical, but not leading into despair over the paradox, because the self then would simply be the relation that, as a finite relation, is also in a relation to the infinite, insofar as it is posited by the infinite. But because the self is also the self-reflexive activity of relating to itself, the self cannot merely statically be in this necessary relation to the infinite; the self has to take this, its own situation and condition of possibility, as the object of reflection. And, hence, the self has to reflect on its own relation to the infinite; however, because the infinite qua infinite can precisely not be grasped by reflection, the relating and relation to the infinite cannot be fully mediated.

The irresolvability of the situation is again more than an epistemological conundrum—running up against the limits of knowing here is inseparably bound up with the experience of one's own finitude:[189] The impossibility of grounding oneself, grasping the infinite other, grasping God as the ground of one's existence at the same time as grasping one's own self-constitutive self-relating—the irresolvability is

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[189] Foucault has argued this point in his essay "What Is Critique?": "[I]n Kant's eyes, critique will be what he is going to say to knowledge: do you know up to what point you can know? Reason as much as you want, but do you really know up to what point you can reason without it becoming dangerous? Critique will say, in short, that it is not so much a matter of what we are undertaking, more or less courageously, than it is the idea we have of our knowledge and its limits" (195).

precisely not only and not even primarily a cognitive problem, a problem of the finite's inability to grasp the infinite. The epistemological problem is an existential one: it is the impossibility of grounding oneself, the experience of the unmasterability of my being in this world, of my being in this world as a finite being, with my body, with my feelings, with others in ways that are infinitely beyond my control and yet constantly under and in my influence. The origin and logic of life is beyond my grasp; life is precarious and perishable, and at the same time the self is precisely not reducible to mere life and life is not reducible to God, since my finiteness will always be part of me, my life.

The response to this inevitable paradox is despair, but it was also despair that made it possible to see the paradox of human existence. Furthermore, there is no way for the individual to sublate and overcome the despair about the paradox by resolving it (*SUD* 14). Butler emphasizes that "the effort pre-emptively to resolve this paradox is the feat of despair" ("Kierkegaard" 372). The characteristic of the paradox is precisely its irresolvability and its simultaneously demanding resolution. The question then becomes how to attend properly to the paradox without preemptively rushing to resolving it. How then can we live with the paradox? How can we live the paradox? The only way to deal with it adequately is to affirm it in a way so that the affirmation does not pacify or resolve the paradox. What does it mean though to "resolve" the paradox? "To resolve" here seems to mean to attempt to fully explain, to offer a rational logical explanation of the paradox and its irresolvability and hence take the edge off of that which makes the situation existentially excruciating. But at the same time, since the situation in which the self finds itself cannot be resolved and remains paradoxical, the attempt to fully rationalize the paradox in terms of its irresolvability would mean to foreclose on the existential tarrying in solitude and on the individual response. And if the paradox is what emerges due to the failure of rational mediation, the affirmation of this paradox has to happen, Kierkegaard tells us, in a nonrational, passionate way and this affirmation has to be repeated infinitely (see also *Kierkegaard* 372). There is no logic of faith and there is no short-cut to faith; doubt and despair cannot be circumvented.

Even so, although there is no logic, faith cannot be rationally argued, and its demands on the individual are beyond rational justification, it is precisely this assertion that there can be no rational justification for faith that is most disconcerting

in the face of religious and other kinds of fundamentalism. It is disconcerting, because it seems that with establishing faith as "beyond rationality," there are no grounds then from which to contest claims of faith. This becomes especially problematic with regard to ethical and political issues. But there is an irony even to the attempt to establish and argumentatively affirm that faith is the passionate affirmation of the infinite by virtue of the absurd and thus cannot be explained rationally. The irony here is that to make this claim already means to employ rational, argumentative language. The question then is not only how to communicate that which cannot be communicated, but even by attempting such a claim more generally, the authority and authorship of the claim and of the one making it are called into question. This means we are encountering here a question of whether and how authority is established in and through language and, more particularly, how at the limits of argumentative thought Kierkegaard's authorship as well as authority is established precisely through the failure of the text.

Butler offers this point of and about authorship and failure, or, rather, she performs this point, but this point cannot be simply stated. Instead, she ventriloquizes Kierkegaard: "My texts *must* fail to express the infinite, and it will be by virtue of that *failure* that the infinite will be affirmed. Moreover, that affirming of the infinite will not take the form of a thought; it will take place at the limits of thought itself; it will force a crisis in thought, the advent of passion" ("Kierkegaard" 375). Kierkegaard comes to speak through her; she is not quoting him, but it is him whom she lets speak to "prove" her reading of him. Thus, this is the point in Butler's text where the author Judith Butler is effaced; she cannot succeed in making the argument on behalf of the necessary failure of the argument, her writing on its own cannot reach this point, her text is threatened by the failure to fail. As failure to fail looms large, the author Judith Butler lets Søren Kierkegaard speak for her, Søren Kierkegaard comes to perform and stage the author Judith Butler, Søren Kierkegaard speaks Judith Butler speaking Søren Kierkegaard. Søren Kierkegaard did not say, was not able to say, what becomes possible for him to say the moment that Judith Butler lets him speak. But that is the very moment in which Judith Butler gives up her authorship or is dispossessed of her own argument, creating a moment of eloquent silence, of silence at labor as much as an ironical failure to fail. The text fails to perform the failure, because in the moment that it succeeds to communicate the failure to communicate, the text no longer fails.

Butler is staging Kierkegaard, making an unfaithful leap to prepare for and offer the argument that "affirming of the infinite will not take the form of a thought; it will take place at the limits of thought itself; it will force a crisis in thought, the advent of passion" ("Kierkegaard" 375).

So the failure to fail would be to affirm the infinite in the form of thought and foreclose on the crisis of thought that despair opens up. This opening up by despair is precisely the opening that is the horizon signifying the advent of passion. While faith as the passionate affirmation of the infinite then cannot be captured by thought, cannot be performed by thought, faith at the same time requires thought not only as its epistemological limit. Instead, faith requires the *experience of the crisis* of thinking and speaking as the condition of faith's emergence. Hence, faith cannot be simply communicated, invoked, or defended in language; rather, "Kierkegaard is clear that in the end faith, and passion more generally, is not a matter of writing or speaking, but of remaining silent" ("Kierkegaard" 376). But this remaining silent is a "labor of silence" ("Kierkegaard" 376) at the limits not only of thought and rationality, but, as it becomes very clear in *Fear and Trembling*, the limits of thought and rationality are bound up with the question of my being in relation with others, my living in a society with norms, customs, and rules. Remaining silent and the risk of faith, the advent of passion, is not simply a monological matter or a matter of my individuality, my relation with myself, and the possibility of my relation to faith. Remaining silent establishes and interrupts relations with others, and in *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard belabors how faith and the unspeakable in the leap of faith are inseparable from the individual's being traversed by fear and anxiety.

In Kierkegaard's treatment of Genesis 22, where Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac and thus takes him up to the Mount Moriah where the sacrifice is to take place, Butler observes that "Kierkegaard is not only horrified by the sacrifice that faith has exacted from Abraham. He is also appalled by the fact that Abraham appears to get Isaac back, that God not only asks for a sacrifice, but returns what has been lost, and all this *without reason*" ("Kierkegaard" 377-8).[190] Kierkegaard is also horrified by

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[190] The interest of this discussion here is one that is systematic, rather than exegetical or historical. It is interesting to note that the story in the Jewish tradition is related as the *akedah* of Isaac, the *binding* of Isaac. Recent exegetical studies in Christian theology take this into account, and the notion of sacrifice has

the fact that Abraham had to actually draw the knife. Kierkegaard seems to be terrified that Abraham did precisely not doubt God, neither before nor after the episode, and yet Abraham's not doubting—or at least that his doubt cannot and is not accounted for in the story—is what renders Abraham the father of faith. But what about Isaac? He had asked his father where the lamb was, and his father told him that God would provide. Isaac was bound to the stake as his father drew the knife. Through all this, Isaac did not speak. What kind of silence is Isaac's silence? How terrifyingly admirable is Isaac's faith? Isaac did not lose his faith; he believed in his father's God, the God who demanded his death from his father. Isaac did not doubt that this was God's demand, but did Isaac not reject this God? What was this trust in his God and in his father? What kind of faith Isaac must have had? Isaac, the forgotten son of faith? Or had Isaac long before lost his faith? How to speak about Isaac?

Kierkegaard does not focus on Isaac and instead wrestles with the question how to understand Abraham. How could he act like this? How could God ask this of Abraham? How could it be that Abraham did not doubt God? How could Abraham proceed to the very point of actually drawing the knife? How are we to read and understand the story of Abraham and Isaac? What is at stake? What is at stake while Isaac is on the altar? God as well as Abraham. What is interpellated and interrogated is faith itself: "What kind of relation can I have to faith?" And what kind of relation must I perhaps have to faith? In other words, must I perhaps refuse a God who makes such demands as does the God of Abraham? The question here is not how to attain a psychological account of Abraham and what emerges as his "faith" and then to evaluate whether or not Abraham's faith is possibly justified. No anthropodicy and no theodicy—the question is how we are to understand faith as emerging at the limits of

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undergone thorough critique; some helpful exegetical studies are T. Desmond Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev: A Source-Crititcal Investigation of Genesis 20:1-22:19* (Carlisle, Cumbria CA: Paternoster P, 1997); Stefan Gathmann, *"Klippenabsturz zu Gott" Gen 22,1-19: Sprachwissenschaftliche Notizen* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2001); Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (ed.), *Opfer: Theologische und kulturelle Kontexte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000); Lukas Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks, Band 1: Gen 22,1-19 im Alten Testament, im Frühjudentum und im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vlynn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998); Lukas Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks, Band 2: Gen 22,1-19 in frühen rabbinischen Texten* (Neukirchen-Vlynn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998); Michael Krupp, *Den Sohn opfern? Die Isaak-Überlieferung bei Juden, Christen, und Muslimen* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995); R.W.L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); Heinz-Dieter Neef, *Die Prüfung Abrahams: eine exegetisch-theologische Studie zu Gen 22, 1-19*

anthropodicy and theodicy, at the limits when human and God are radically, existentially at stake. But it turns out that God becomes quite unimportant in Kierkegaard in the way that theodicy does not interest him at all—is God at stake then? Only for Abraham's sake? It is probably the case for Kierkegaard that he presumed our "standing before God" and that this standing before God was not a question for him, existentially, not transcendentally—or that for him the transcendental becomes existential and hence can no longer be a "pure" and untouched transcendental; this is where the epistemological reveals its ethical valence, because it is an existential matter of life and living and not merely an intellectual thought-experiment.

So we might ask how we could perhaps open precisely this existential dimension up toward a historical specificity. The command and demand of God do not arrive outside history; they arrive within one's own situation within history, one's own having a particular story with particular traditions, and even for one's non-stories, one's disentanglement from those traditions, still God's call does not arrive outside time and history, but precisely within these. Yet perhaps God's call is precisely that which ruptures the story; it ruptures the course and progression of time, breaks in, renders the individual answerable to an unanswerable, unlivable demand. This question can be framed as the question of the paradox and how to attend to this paradox, how to live the unlivable. This question in its existential exigency means that the question of the paradox and the individual emerging through the paradox can precisely not be saved and secured by anthropodicy or theodicy. In fact, both these attempts are not refuted, but the existential urgency renders them irrelevant.

The way Kierkegaard opens his interrogations is not by offering an argumentative introduction or a philosophical exposition, and in fact the author introduces himself (in the third person, under a different name) as not being a philosopher: "He has not understood the system, whether there is one, whether it is completed .... Even if someone were able to transpose the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that he has comprehended faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it entered into him. The present author is by no means a philosopher" (*FT* 7).

(Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1998); Georg Steins, *Die "Bindung Isaaks" im Kanon (Gen 22): Grundlagen und*

The author, who introduces himself here as Johannes de Silentio, thus starts out by emphasizing that to wrestle with the story of Abraham and to desire to understand Abraham's faith does not depend on a philosophical inquiry and in fact that a philosophical tract cannot guarantee understanding faith. While Kierkegaard or his alter ego Johannes de Silentio will conduct a philosophical argument in *Fear and Trembling*, he begins by attempting to tell the story of what happened on the way to, at, and after Mount Moriah. He attempts to narrate and make sense of what happened, to give an account of the events and how they fit together. Yet none of his attempts are utterly satisfactory. The conclusion here is not that Abraham cannot be understood; rather, the exordium ends leaving the question open: "No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?" (*FT* 14). And it seems as if it is the very openness of this question and the difficulty of getting a grasp of what it would take to understand Abraham, what it would mean to understand Abraham, that is what enables the possibility of belaboring the story and the question of what it means to have faith.

Belaboring this impossibility seems to figure as insistently laboring on the point where the events break the representation and bring representation to its own inherent limit—and perhaps here Abraham and his deed emerge as an exemplarily non-exemplar, as generalizable only precisely in its non-generalizability. Abraham is taken as exemplar as man of faith, but this faith emerges precisely where language, justification, and rational argumentation fail. Hence he and his doing cannot simply be generalized into a rule or paradigm of faith. Because if one were to do the same as Abraham did in the name of faith, by invoking Abraham as example and paradigm, one would precisely miss the core of Abraham's faith, namely that faith cannot justify itself, but remains radically open to critique in its particularity. Thus Abraham cannot speak, and his inability to speak is his anguish, but it is this silence which, according to Kierkegaard, renders Abraham father of faith. His "interlocutors"—or, rather, the others to whom Abraham is in relation—are Isaac and God. It seems that Isaac, then, comes to stand in for and circumscribe the sphere of the ethical and God the sphere of

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Programm einer kanonisch-intertextuellen Lektüre (Freiburg: Herder, 1999).

the religious. The problem ensues, it seems, as there arises a demand that sets the religious and the ethical into conflict.

The divine demand Abraham faces is to sacrifice his son Isaac: "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and get into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2). God wants Abraham to sacrifice his son, but another complication in the story between Abraham and God is that God had earlier promised Abraham to be the father of a vast multitude of descendants through his son Isaac. This would seem to be rendered utterly impossible with the sacrifice of Isaac. And at this point Kierkegaard emphasizes that it is not Abraham's faith that enables him to give up Isaac. According to Kierkegaard, for Abraham to have faith does not mean for him to believe that God will somehow in the end give him Isaac back, but it also does not mean to abandon his faith in God's promise to him. That which enables Abraham to give up the worldly is a "purely human courage" that is precisely not faith: "It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity, but this I do gain and in all eternity I can never renounce—it is a self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac" (*FT* 49). It is not because Abraham believes that he can give up his son and thus give up his ties to this world. But faith is that by which Abraham gets Isaac back—and this faith is offered to us as "a paradoxical and humble courage" which operates as a kind of affirming and grasping what is in this world and one's ties to it "by virtue of the absurd." Abraham gets Isaac back. As Abraham lifts the knife above the boy tied to the altar, God lets his angel tell Abraham to stop and to instead sacrifice the ram caught in a nearby bush. The test is over. But is it a test? A test for whom? Of what? Abraham gets Isaac back.[191] But to get him back, Abraham must have given up Isaac—fully and uncompromisingly—and for the giving up to be an offering and not a temptation, Abraham must have wholeheartedly loved Isaac—fully and

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[191] Fackenheim in his preface to Krupp's book recounts how he had been asked by a young orthodox Jew who asked him whether he had ever thought about why God himself addressed Abraham to demand Isaac's sacrifice, but why God then sent an angel to stop Abraham. Fackenheim admitted that he had never considered this peculiarity and the young man offered: "God was angry with Abraham, ... Abraham failed the

uncompromisingly—and it is precisely not faith that enables the offering: "Faith is not a bargain; it is that affirmation that emerges when all bargaining has failed" ("Kierkegaard" 378). Faith is no insurance policy, a belief in a higher cause that renders this world less important and hence makes it possible to give up one's attachments to the people and things in this world in the name of faith and on the basis of knowing that one will win faith and eternity. It is "a purely human courage," Kierkegaard tells us, that is at the heart of giving up one's attachments to those people and things in one's life here, but that is not faith. Faith is not ascetic renunciation. The courage of faith is a paradoxical and humble courage by which one grasps and affirms the entirety of the temporal in the now, but at the same time this affirmation seems to become possible only "now by virtue of the absurd," at the apex of despair and resignation. One cannot leap to faith and circumvent despair and the courage it takes to brave despair, but, equally, despair and the giving up of the temporal do not automatically lead to the regaining of the lost through faith.

So faith emerges only as a leap, and in this clean philosophical language, it nearly seems as if we can easily speak about this phenomenon. But if we return to Abraham and remember that the emergence of faith and Abraham as the father of faith is only by Abraham's readiness to murder his own son, then we are far from having settled the problematic of faith as a leap beyond thought and rational certainty. The problematic reemerges with urgency: How to speak about Abraham? It is very clear that for Kierkegaard the question "How to speak about Abraham?" is the question of how to speak *responsibly* about Abraham, how to *respond well* to the address that comes from the story of Abraham and Isaac. What if we praise Abraham as the epitome of a man of faith? Does that mean to condone or even promote murder? Kierkegaard is emphatic that "to sell a cheap edition of Abraham and yet forbid everyone to do likewise is ludicrous" (*FT* 53). But it remains a nagging question how then it can be that the paradox of faith can transform "a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act" (*FT* 53).

The way Kierkegaard continues to ask this question is by asking whether there is a possibility of the suspension of the ethical. This inquiry is trying to speak while

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test. ... When He demanded of Abraham to offer Isaac, He wanted Abraham's refusal. He didn't want a 'Yes'

holding its own breath, because the question remains "How to speak about Abraham?" This means that there might always be the possibility that it remains impossible to speak about Abraham and that the only way of speaking about him is not to speak about him. In that case, even the attempt to deliberate whether the ethical can be suspended would already be an irretrievable failure in remaining silent. What would it mean for the possibility of faith, if it turned out that there is no possibility for sustaining the paradox? Asking the question what relation to faith is possible means to ask more precisely what relation to faith is possible in the face of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Staying with the question is an anxiety-ridden enterprise, because there is no guarantee, not even the guarantee that there will at least always be openness and uncertainty that will leave open the possibility of the paradox. Asking the question, inquiring into what it means to attempt to understand Abraham, might mean that in the end the result will be that it takes someone greater to believe, that I cannot and will not believe, that I cannot and will not make the leap of faith: "I, for my part, perhaps can understand Abraham, but I also realize that I do not have the courage to speak in this way, no more than I have the courage to act as Abraham did" (*FT* 119-20). This implies that while before inquiring I was doubting, I was living with the uncertainty whether I would, whether I could, whether I would want to make the leap of faith, facing the question will mean a certain loss of innocence—even if that is a phantasmatic innocence. I will not be able to forget having asked the question; I will not be able to forget having doubted. Facing the moment of decision might bring me into a place from where there is no return—and I cannot know the consequences. Perhaps it will turn out that I have no feeling for the questions of faith and what it means to believe, that these questions have only been excruciating because I had learned that they are and need to be, but they are not important to me. But perhaps it is not even this kind of "loss" of faith that threatens Kierkegaard's I so much. Perhaps it would be worse if I came to find that these questions, this God who makes these demands, are mine, but that I might not want them to be mine, that I will have to refuse them, or that I want to refuse them but cannot. It might turn out that I end up in a place where I have to decide between refusing or accepting, a place where

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but a 'No'" (Krupp 8-9).

I cannot quite reject finding myself addressed and interpellated by a tradition bound up with this God who asks these cruel sacrifices and capriciously then decides to reverse his mind and demands faith against all understanding, demands faith precisely in the face of this caprice and cruelty—but these questions are not all quite Kierkegaard's concern. For Kierkegaard, there seems to be no doubt that each individual is interpellated by the question of faith, the demand of the infinite in addition to the demand of the other. Kierkegaard is presupposing this leap, this leap that is the condition for experiencing oneself existentially interpellated by the questions of faith. But the question that seems to scare Kierkegaard and that at the same time he is willing to dare is how to understand Abraham and even more whether we are allowed to understand Abraham or, rather, whether we are allowed not to understand him and can still suspend judgment. In Kierkegaard's terms, this is the question of whether there is a suspension of the ethical: whether we are, from the perspective of the ethical, compelled to judge and condemn Abraham for his willingness to kill his son, but whether there is another point of view that would allow or perhaps even demand a suspension of this judgment. The *suspension* of judgment, however, is not a nullification of judgment.

The problem of the possibility of suspension is that "[t]he ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times" (*FT* 54). The ethical as universal is that by which every individual is bound and emerges here as that which seems by definition impossible to suspend, because it applies always to everyone under all circumstances. The question that Kierkegaard asks is whether the universal can be suspended in some way, so that in the case of Abraham, the individual Abraham and his answering to God's demand can emerge as higher than his ethical responsibility to his son: "In ethical terms, Abraham's relation to Isaac is quite simply this: the father shall love the son more than himself" (*FT* 57). The first inquiry Kierkegaard sets out to follow is to see whether Abraham can be justified ethically, whether his ethical obligation towards Isaac can be suspended through invoking another obligation.

Suspending this question for a moment, it is striking that it is the relation to his son, the responsibility to an other person, and not the question of his own life that is at the heart of Abraham's crisis. To what extent or in what ways, then, does it matter that the crisis of thought through which faith then can emerge is anguish not over one's

relation to oneself in the face of God, but anguish over one's relation to another in the face of God? This scene seems to have resonances with Levinas and his account of the face that issues the command "You shall not kill" and that at the same time seems to incite murder. The subject emerges in the face of the vexing possibility of the death of the other, of always already having deserted and killed the other, and in the face of the anxiety of having to kill the other. What about faith? Faith cannot alleviate this situation; faith does not take away from the responsibility. Thus, faith can happen only—if at all—in and through the moment of crisis in relation to the other. It is not quite in line with Kierkegaard to emphasize the relation to the other to this extent, since it seems that for him the emphasis is rather on the individual's being answerable and this answerability then is an answerability to God's demand as well as to the demand of the community. But still the ethical demand comes to Abraham only through Isaac, Isaac his son, and in asking how Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegelian philosophy figures here, Butler wonders in a footnote how Hegel's account in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* might have been different had the bondsman had a child (see "Kierkegaard" 392).

Butler works out the difference between Abraham's anxiety and the bondsman's fear in these terms: "Hegel's bondsman trembles before that which he has created, the external confirmation of his own power to create, Abraham trembles (inwardly) before that which he is compelled by God to sacrifice and destroy" ("Kierkegaard" 383). So the difference that we come to see here is that for the bondsman his fear arises with regard to an external evidence of his own creative power and in the face of the full release and assumption of this power that also reflects to him his own finitude in the transient object that he produces. For Abraham, anxiety does not arise over his creative productive power and its external manifestation. Abraham's anxiety is inward, his being bound to another is unquestioned, and his crisis arises over the power and demand to murder.[192] How are these three aspects of Abraham's trembling

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[192] It would be interesting and important to inquire into the relation between sacrifice and destruction, because sacrifice might not be simple destruction, as a sacrifice is also a sacrifice *for* something and hence functioning not as pure negation but also as affirmation. But what does it mean that this affirmation can only occur through a negation that is a sacrifice, an offering? In what ways is sacrifice different from the negation of the negation that occurs in Hegelian *Aufhebung*? How does the sacrifice of the self in the self-consciousness chapter figure in this relation? Also it would be interesting to return to the notion of sacrifice in Levinas and ask how it operates with regard to the relation between enjoyment and enjoinment, proximity

related? Butler offers the inwardness of Abraham's trembling in parentheses, and thus calls attention to it in a way that is both interjected into the rest of the argument and yet remains other to the rest of the sentence. The inwardness of the life of Abraham's anxiety cannot be quite assimilated to the parallelism with Hegel's bondsman. The bondsman's trembling is not said to be fully externalized; rather, we do not hear about how the bondsman trembles. But Abraham emerges as trembling inside. It seems that his trembling is not externalized, does not reach the outside, is not externally perceivable. But what kind of interiority emerges here, and how is this inwardness bound up with the labor of silence that traverses and constitutes the advent of faith? Does the interiority of the anxiety emerge because Abraham can only anticipate vaguely what he is about to do? Does he come to tremble inwardly because the demands he comes to face allow him a glimpse of that which he may be capable to do, of that which he may be compelled to do and yet not so compelled that he could not will it otherwise?

The bondsman's fear emerges in the face of his dawning freedom from any external authority. The bondsman seems to be overwhelmed by the moment of unboundedness, while Abraham's anxiety emerges in the face of his relation and responsibility to a human other (Isaac) and a divine other (God). While Abraham's freedom might be figured as similarly overwhelming, there is a crucial difference to the bondsman's freedom, because Abraham's freedom emerges to him here as his being free to sacrifice one demand and bond for the other, betraying one for the other. Abraham is free not to follow God's command and save his son's life—and this freedom, the ability to decide and having to decide over his son's life, is Abraham's anguish. Yet it would be mistaken to assume that Abraham could shake off either bond in whatever his decision will be. As Butler lays it out, the difference between Hegel's bondsman and Abraham then plays out in their reaction to their own anxiety: "Hegel's bondsman retreats from the fearful prospect of his own freedom through enslaving himself to ethical projects and practicing various rituals of self-denial. Abraham, on the other hand, must bind himself to an authority whose demands are

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and suffering for the other. But what are the implications if the gratuity of being is one that cannot arrive other than through sacrifice? Yet, this sacrifice in Levinas cannot be an experience and even less a willful act, because it figures prior to there being an ego that could experience or will anything.

incomprehensible, an act which leaves him frighteningly detached from the ethical community and from his own rational capacities" ("Kierkegaard" 383-4). The bondsman, Butler argues, turns on himself, takes himself as his own master, and the telos and rationality of his self-bondage are "ethical projects" and self-abnegation.[193] But the important point is precisely that it is this turning on himself and self-subjection in order to attain certitude that renders the bondsman so different from Abraham. The bondsman takes himself as an authority, emerges as split subject internalizing the lord-bondsman scheme, and becomes obsessed with his projects of subjecting and purifying his body. Consciousness comes to map onto the lord's position and the body onto the bondsman's position, figuring the horizon for the bondsman's crafting a rationale according to which his actions make sense and on which he can rely in his actions. Abraham, on the other hand, remains bound to an authority radically different from himself, so different that this authority's demands remain incomprehensible and, even more, fly in the face of all rationality. While the bondsman in the Hegelian narrative is on his way into the community, or the ethical community is on its way to emergence and the bondsman to becoming a self-certain, self-realizing individual through his induction into this community, Abraham emerges as an individual through a detachment from the ethical community: "Abraham, on the other hand, must bind himself to an authority whose demands are incomprehensible, an act which leaves him frighteningly detached from the ethical community and from his own rational capacities" ("Kierkegaard" 383-4).

In precisely this detachment, Abraham is very unlike the tragic hero. The tragic hero is still in the sphere of the ethical as he suspends the ethical demand. This means that the tragic hero suspends one ethical end in the name of another, of a higher end that is even more universal. Kierkegaard's example is Agamemnon, who sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia in order to ensure the safety of his *polis'* expedition to Troy to fight Priam for the abduction of Helen. Agamemnon as a tragic hero suspends one

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[193] The move that Butler performs here is extremely quick, figuring asceticism and self-renunciation at this stage invested by the unhappy consciousness as *ethical* projects. In Hegel's narrative these projects are not quite yet attributed "ethical" value, the stage of the unhappy consciousness serves him to *prefigure* the emergence of the ethical sphere. It would be important to inquire into the particularity of the valorization of these "projects" and the strange "guilt" of the subject's actions to which they pertain. Furthermore it would be important to ask how these projects as well as that guilt then relate to that which will emerge as the ethical sphere and its norms, at this stage we are dealing with the project of self-realization and certitude about itself.

particular relation to the ethical—the obligation towards his daughter—but he does not suspend the ethical *in toto* since his obligation toward his community remains within the sphere of the ethical and is instituted as that by virtue of which he suspends the first obligation. Abraham is no tragic hero: "There is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham's life than that the father shall love the son" (*FT* 59). For Agamemnon, the well-being of the expedition and his *polis* came to express a more universal demand than his responsibility towards the life of his daughter. This does not mean that Kierkegaard proffers the sacrifice of Iphigenia as morally justified; in fact, he is not really interested in whether or not this particular suspension is justified or not. Kierkegaard is instead interested in the fact that Agamemnon could deliberate and voice his predicament to his fellow warriors, which exposes him as tragic, while Abraham can precisely not speak: "Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me" (*FT* 60). And now it becomes clearer what it means that Abraham cannot remain within the ethical community and that only through this detachment can he emerge in a "private relationship to the divine." This relationship is between the individual and the absolute, and it is an absolute relationship. This relationship resists all attempts to mediate, justify, and explain it.

Abraham cannot speak his anguish, his anguish cannot enter into language, because all voiced agonizing returns the divine demand into the sphere of the ethical. There is no justification possible for Abraham, and it is here that the ethical emerges in Kierkegaard's reading as temptation to Abraham.[194] But what does that mean? Does faith have to prove itself by defying the ethical norms and values of the community? There is no possibility for us to take such a defiance as signum and seal of faith, as ultimate proof, because this would mean to return the act of faith into the order of the communally acknowledged, the rationally justified and at least morally condoned. But while the defiance of ethical norms cannot be justified and lauded as act of faith within that very same order that is defied, the question remains: what does it mean, if indeed faith emerges only through precisely such an act of flying in the face of the ethical? What a strange reversal: it is not murdering the other, his son Isaac, that

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[194] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1995).

comes to figure as temptation for Abraham, but the temptation is the ethical. But what does this mean? What is "the ethical" and what does it mean to "be tempted by the ethical"?

The ethical in Kierkegaard comes to figure in the Hegelian sense as the mores of the community, as that which is sanctioned and supported by one's community. "The ethical" as temptation hence becomes the temptation to default to the mores, the accepted morals, that which one has come to take as good and right, that which makes it possible for one to know that one's actions will be condoned, accepted, or even applauded. The temptation then is not to risk: "The tragic hero gives up the certain for the even more certain, and the observer's eye views him with confidence" (*FT* 60). The tragic hero does precisely not risk. Does this then mean that risking emerges as a requirement? Not quite. It seems that in the moment that a certain risk becomes a requirement, then this risk again is returned to the ethical sphere and becomes a strange moral requirement—and, at the same time, risking is not about calling into question the ethical norms for the sake of calling them into question, not about risking for the risk's sake. Such a self-justificatory gesture of the act referring to its authenticity in its risking is precisely impossible; there is no logic, it is a leap, a radical act that cannot defend itself. But that this leap, this radical act cannot defend it self does not mean that it is therefore beyond all criticism, precisely not. Rather it is never closed off from criticism. Kierkegaard's argument, then, is proposing to us a certain mode of being, a posture: I have to dare my decision and I have to live up to it—if I decide to take the risk because it is good for me to risk the safety of certain certainties in my life, then I end up precisely not taking any risk; then I, like the tragic hero, come to sacrifice only to win an even a more certain good, namely, my certain loss.

For Abraham, there is no certainty and the risk is not some higher good; faith does not come without anxiety, and, more specifically, Butler draws attention to the fact that Abraham's faith is not an enterprise that is ethically and politically insignificant and that has nothing to do with one's being implicated in a community: "This act of putting into question the ethical law as a final authority over one's life engages Abraham in anxiety, for in questioning the law, Abraham encounters his own being apart from the ethical community in which he stands" ("Kierkegaard" 381-2). Faith is emerging here as bound up with critique; in critiquing a certain set of norms

and laws, one risks one's own intelligibility and life that is enabled and sustained—even if this sustaining is at the limits of sustainability, such as, for example, as an asocial subject, as aging and "still-not dead," as a "tolerated" migrant worker, as an "not-yet-assimilated" subject owing to one's being a Muslim and an immigrant. Putting into question the norms and laws that support a given social and ethical order and hence also support and enable one's own life in this order involves a certain desubjectivation. This undoing of one's own position and of one's life and its conditions to a certain degree involves anxiety, because the effects of this act are incalculable: "[A]nd faith does not resolve anxiety, but exists with it. Any finite individual can have faith only by contracting anxiety, for all faith involves some loss or weakening of worldly connections, including the worldly connection to one's own finite, bodily self" ("Kierkegaard" 379). Faith does not enable the risking of one's worldly life, and the anxiety that is the horizon for the advent of faith is not resolved by faith.

This putting into question is not merely a matter of criticizing laws and norms of one's ethical community; it also involves the relations that one has in this world. Friends, lovers, family are relations that are not commensurable with one's position in a community, but these bonds are not beyond this community; they are worldly connections. Abraham does not merely experience himself at a distance from his community and from the ethical norms upheld by this community, but this communal life had very particular faces for him: Sarah, Eliezer, Isaac. The question here is: What does it mean to risk? What precisely is this anxiety that comes to figure as the horizon for the leap of faith? What does it mean to speak and write about this anxiety in attempting to speak and write about acts of faith? How is it that we are so anxious when it comes to risking suspending the norms and rules of the community we live in? Is it even possible to ask "How is it that *we* are so anxious?" or is it not precisely that this "we" is called into question to the point of being suspended and threatened to turn out to be irrecoverable? So it is not only a particular I that is being risked. This risk is not just a risk of oneself and not only difficult and frightening because one might be attached, passionately attached, to one's own life, one's freedom and liberties, one's conveniences that might come into jeopardy as one risks emerging radically apart and in conflict with the laws of one's community. There seems to be more at stake. Critique is precisely not only self-exposure, not only the exposure and risk of one's

own ties, one's own body, one's own position, but involves others, risks others beyond what one can justify or even calculate. Abraham cannot explain to Sarah, Eliezer, or Isaac. It seems as if Abraham is not only about to lose his son and have to live with himself as a murderer, but he might also lose his relationships with those close to him. He cannot be consoled and affirmed in advance by Sarah. And even though in the end God provided the ram and Abraham did not murder his son, the question remains vexing: How to understand Abraham? What to do with Abraham and Isaac? What to do with this God? Do we have to suspend the question whether Abraham was right in doing what he did? At what point does the question of right and wrong reenter? What does it mean to suspend the ethical? To suspend does precisely not mean to overcome or obliterate. Abraham cannot be exonerated, he cannot explain or justify himself, we cannot explain and exonerate Abraham, we cannot admire Abraham. Kierkegaard writes and belabors this irresolvability, this paradox, and tries to hold the paradox open. The either/or into which each of the problemata leads shows that either there is this kind of suspension of the ethical by the individual's direct relation to the absolute or Abraham is lost. But this either/or cannot be resolved within and by reason and reasoning.

This irresovability in fact is the precondition of faith, because if a reasoned decision were possible, then it would be knowledge and precisely not faith. Thus, it is precisely not the case that we could read Abraham as having simply had to undergo this ordeal in order to prove his faith. God's angel tells Abraham that God sees Abraham's faith and believes in Abraham's faith. And it is temptingly easy to read the "for" as causal in the "for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me" (Gen 22:12) as "because," linking Abraham's act of faith and God's sparing Isaac causally. Does this mean that God needed a historically manifested act by which Abraham is to prove his faith? What if the temporal relationship of the events has no causal relationship; what if it does not make sense? This means still that there is God's demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, but we cannot make sense of God's demand, not even after the fact, precisely not after the fact. Abraham remains unjustifiable. God remains unjustifiable. There is no historically manifested proof for Abraham's faith. Faith is that which cannot be captured: it can become manifest, it can emerge through an act of faith, but faith precisely does not precede the act, is not the cause of the act, and it seems as if it even

cannot outlast the act. Or, to put this another way, the historical fact of the act is unable to hold and secure the presence of faith. Faith remains that which cannot be brought about by reasoning or historical evidence. Not only can we then not understand Abraham, but even more so understanding Abraham's story cannot function to produce a believing subject: "Faith does not arrive as the result of a persuasive argument; faith (along with its alternative, despair) is precisely what has the chance to emerge when all argumentation and historical proof fail" ("Kierkegaard" 387). Faith cannot be brought about by argument, and there is no guarantee that the failure of argumentation and proof—in other words, the failure of making sense—will bring about the leap of faith.

Butler seems to offer us persuasiveness as a feature of a certain kind of argument or at least to suggest that being persuaded could be understood as a result of an argument that then would be called persuasive, but faith, she argues, is not a result of this kind of argument. I would want to suggest that we read faith not as opposed to persuasion, and persuasion not as a necessary consequence of argumentation. In line with Butler's own argument for the gap between the speech act and its effects, I would rather want to suggest that we understand persuasion as an "effect" that precisely cannot be controlled by the argumentation or historical circumstances that we come to understand only retrospectively as causal in effecting persuasion. Persuasion then emerges as an effect of reasoning, not as the extension of argument. An argument can convey and bring about knowledge, but to know something does not yet mean to be persuaded. One can even experience feeling that one ought to be persuaded, but "can't quite go there." Persuasion, then, is not a reaction to an argument or an event on which the addressee, recipient, or spectator can decide; rather, persuasion seems to be a kind of leap or transformation that happens to the addressee and that can take place only in the moment in which the both the argument and the addressee fail to control the effects and responses. But the failure of the argument to fully control and reach its effects does not ensure the rise of persuasion; that failure only makes room for the possibility of being persuaded as a response to the argument. Like persuasion, faith "has the *chance* to emerge, *when* all argumentation and historical proof fail" ("Kierkegaard" 387; emphasis added); this failure is not the cause of faith. The emergence of faith is not an automatism triggered by passing through the failure of reasoning. If we now understand persuasion not as opposed to faith, but as a moment

bound up with faith, then we can understand how faith is not knowledge and yet it brings about a certain *Glaubensgewissheit,* a certitude in faith. This certitude in faith is not knowledge; it cannot be rationally proven or secured; it is a paradoxical and precarious mode of being that is not only threatened, but constantly traversed and troubled by the passing through and undergoing radical uncertainty.

In framing this experience of uncertainty as anxiety, Kierkegaard and his belaboring the irresolvability of this paradoxical mode of becoming then, as Butler suggests, reopens thinking about loss, transience, pain, and love: "If one makes the leap of faith, then one invests absolute passion and meaning in the infinite; this entails a suspension not only of the ethical, but of the finite realm altogether, for any finite object of passion will now be understood as emerging as a gift from the infinite and passing back eventually into the infinite. For Kierkegaard, it is only once we affirm the transience and contingency (nonnecessity) of that which we love in this world that we are free to love it at all" ("Kierkegaard" 385). This affirmation of the contingency and transience—which is reminiscent of the Nietzschean motif of affirmation—originates from a suspension that is a letting go that liberates. This kind of letting go as *Gelassenheit* is core to the considerations and preaching of the German mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). In letting go, according to Eckhart, a detachment takes place that is not a flight from the world, but that is a hiatus, and it frees not *from* but *for* practice. In being enabled to let the undoing of the self happen, new possibilities to become emerge and resources for change surface.[195] Mysticism is not an easy way out, sought in resignation; it is instead an incessant uneasiness with this world that furthers a continuous renewal of simple forms of nonconformist action by introducing a hiatus in subject formation. From here we could now understand theology and theological ethics to be engaged in inquiring into the dimensions and the specific problematics of such interruptions. How can there be a possibility for rest that is a

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[195] It would be of great interest to pursue here the thinking of Meister Eckhart further; for studies on Meister Eckhart, see Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroads, 2001); Michael Demkovich, "Beyond Subjectivity: Opening the Ego," *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 29 (1994): 162-173; Dietmar Mieth, "The Model of an Ethics of Being in Meister Eckhart and in the Structural Philosophy of Heinrich Rombach," *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 29 (1994): 186-198. Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1995); Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002).

letting go, that will be an interruption in the incessant reproduction of responsibility and failure that is an incessant increase of violence? How can there be a letting go that makes it possible to renew resources to act? How can there be a letting go that makes it possible to respond responsibly? How can there be a forgiving that is a giving that does not eliminate responsibility, but that also does not eliminate the possibility to take what one is being given as well? How can forgiving be a giving that is a break, but one that enables, a break that liberates the present from the past and the future, but that does not obliterate the past and the future from the present, so that the present is liberated for the past and the future? But, to be sure, letting go or, in Kierkegaard, the suspension and regaining of the finite realm in the leap of faith does not settle the question of the relationship between faith and ethics. The reopening towards the paradoxical and precarious nature of life and love lets the predicament of what kind of sacrifice is involved in this movement reemerge with urgency.

The implications of the sacrifice regarding other persons and their lives remain disquieting, since one cannot securely restrict the sacrifice and pain to one's *own* ties to one's home, to one's family, friends, and lovers. Butler's observation seems to point to and frame this problematic with agonizing lucidity: "For Kierkegaard, if any existing individual becomes the fundamental reason to live, that individual must be sacrificed so that faith can return to its proper object: the infinite" ("Kierkegaard" 384). Kierkegaard is very clear: the fundamental reason and grounds for one to live cannot be any particular individual or any attachment to anything in this world. If that is the case, then—Butler explains—"For Kierkegaard, ... that individual must be sacrificed." This sacrifice is not in the name of faith or in order to prove faith, and it is not simple. What does it mean "to sacrifice an individual"? What kind of severing of bonds, what kind of giving up other persons is meant here? It would be easy to simply offer a psychologizing reading of Kierkegaard and explain his argument as his working through his breaking off his engagement while confessing that, had he truly had faith, he would not have had to sacrifice his fiancée. But what are the implications of Kierkegaard's argument, beyond, despite, or due to his own existential tarrying, as it were? Kierkegaard seems to ask us—through his story, through his texts—to confront our attachments to persons and things in this world and our investment in them. Kierkegaard is not simply elevating and celebrating an ideal of the radically independent individual, but no existing individual is to "become the fundamental

reason to live." What, though, does it mean for something to "become the fundamental reason to live"?

Implied here is that the attachment to another person is the very relation that becomes that which sustains one's life. In other words, if this other person were no longer, that would mean the end to one's life. One could now argue that this is a kind of radical dependence and giving up of one's control and that the sacrificing of this person and of one's attachment to this person (it is another question whether one ever truly can achieve such a severing of one's ties) then is an act of regaining control and grounding the individual in itself. But perhaps the aspect of regaining control is not the whole story to be told here. It is important to hold this aspect present and perhaps to see in what ways it always "contaminates" the purity of any offering and hence threatens it. Yet instead of establishing us as independent from this world and in a place beyond, although not-quite-yet beyond this world, the sacrifice also opens a way to love others and this world in their contingency. This means that the passing away, the transience, the radical contingency of lives is not something that needs to be disavowed and the pain of loss, the uncertainty of life and love come to bear fully and the finite is no longer invested with absolute meaning (see *Kierkegaard* 384). Instead, the infinite is invested with absolute meaning but remains infinite, just as in Abraham's responding to God's demand and binding himself to this God who remains infinitely other and incomprehensible to him.

And still it remains an enigma, a terrifying enigma, how willingly Abraham seems to bind himself to this authority's demand, to God's demand to sacrifice his son. What is this kind of attachment to God? Abraham does not doubt God in his demand. Abraham, the very Abraham who earlier had pleaded with God and beaten down the requirement for Sodom being spared destruction (Gen. 18:20-33), does not this time tussle with God.[196] Abraham did not go out at night to argue with God: "So, how was that with your commandment 'Thou shall not kill'? Does this mean you don't take that so seriously anymore? What do you want from me? Not to kill? But how is my sacrificing Isaac not killing him?" We do not hear Abraham argue with God, and the Kierkegaardian answer that having pleaded would have made him a

tragic hero does not precisely settle matters. The question that emerges here, which is also a question for Kierkegaard, is: what is the role of an other's life in faith? What is the role of the commandment "You shall not kill"? What does it imply for the ethical, if we understand, perhaps in a certain sense with Levinas, the "You shall not kill" as arriving as God's commandment only through the face of another person whose life I come to experience as precarious and perilously in my hands?

Kierkegaard figures his perplexity in the face of Abraham's silence before God in terms of God's promise about Abraham's offspring being at stake. And for Kierkegaard the ethical demand—prohibiting the murder of Isaac—and the divine demand—asking for the sacrifice of Isaac—belong to different orders. In other words, Kierkegaard's Abraham cannot argue with God on the basis of two conflicting divine commandments, and the relation to the other person figures for Kierkegaard as a matter of the finite realm only. In his brief engagement with Kierkegaard, Levinas explains: "The ethical means the general to Kierkegaard. The singularity of the *I* would be lost under the rule that is valid for all. Generality can neither contain nor express the secret of the *I*, infinitely needy and distressed for itself" ("Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics" 72).[197] Levinas here gives us a key to reading Kierkegaard's separating the ethical demand and the divine demand; Kierkegaard's concern is the individual that is not to be engulfed and devoured by the general, the universal, which seems to render the individual an interchangeable instance in the system of ethical norms. In a way, this is precisely also what we might be able to call Levinas' concern, although the way that the individual emerges as a concern for Levinas is very different from Kierkegaard. But one question that we will have to ask is whether the concerns are indeed so very different and what it means if they are not.

For Kierkegaard, there is something in every individual that is unspeakable and cannot be expressed and cannot be captured by universality. If the universal is now the ethical, then the individual is precisely that which cannot emerge and be presented in the ethical order. For the individual to emerge as an individual, Kierkegaard argues forcibly, the individual needs come into a direct relationship with the absolute. As in

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[196] Again it would be important to think more about the distinction and relation between destruction and sacrifice, as Sodom is to be destroyed whereas Isaac is to be sacrificed.
[197] Emmanuel Levinas, "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics," *Proper Names,* 66-74.

the case of Abraham, this relationship means to emerge at a distance from the universal and the act that this leap requires cannot be justified within the universal order. We even or precisely cannot reason and decide argumentatively whether this relation is even possible. But, for Kierkegaard, the supreme individualization happens as the individual relates to the other that is the absolute, the infinite, God, and the human other and the relationship to this human other remains other, completely other to this relation with the absolute.

Levinas now disturbs in two ways this clear separation that Kierkegaard offers us. Firstly, Levinas contests Kierkegaard's identifying the ethical demand with the universal in such a way that the ethical is that which cancels out the individual. On the contrary, Levinas argues that the ethical is the very address and demand that singles out and brings about the individual. Secondly, the ethical demand in Levinas arrives as the commandment "You shall not kill" and thus the divine commandment is that which manifests the ethical. So, for both Kierkegaard and Levinas, it is the divine demand that individualizes, but for Levinas this divine demand is not separable from the responsibility for the human other; rather, the divine demand is indistinguishable from this responsibility for the other: "Ethics as consciousness of a responsibility toward others ..., far from losing you in a generality, singularizes you, poses you as a unique individual, as *I.*" ("A Propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'" 76).[198] Like it is for Kierkegaard, the individual is for Levinas also that which is unique and singular and cannot be presented in or captured by the general. But, unlike for Kierkegaard, for Levinas it is the ethical demand arriving through the face of the other person that occasions the individual's emergence. So the other person is prior to the "I," and individuality is constituted only through being addressed and responsible to the other. The difference with Kierkegaard that I would like to emphasize here is that for Levinas the concern about the individual emerges only in the back of or as byproduct of his concern about the other's want and about how to respond to the other without negating the other, without sublating, controlling, and canceling out the address by the other and the other as other. Levinas' concern with individuality, then, could be said to be figured through the concern for inassimilability and the necessity and possibility

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[198] Emmanuel Levinas, "A Propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'," *Proper Names,* 75-79.

of a relation between humans. Kierkegaard instead centers on the individual and the individuality that is a task and a paradox. The individual in Kierkegaard is by no means unquestioned, invincible, self-assured; on the contrary, Kierkegaard's I is shaken at its very foundations, is called into question in its very existence. The relation to the other is constitutive to the individual's emergence, but—Levinas remarks critically—subjectivity and individuality emerge with "incomparable strength" ("A Propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'" 76).

There is indeed an aspect in Kierkegaard's considerations that make it seem as if the other—human as well as divine—is standing in for the finite and the infinite, functioning to make sense of and think the paradox of the individual's existence. I would want to suggest, however, that especially *Fear and Trembling* can be reread in a way so that it cannot be subsumed under this criticism quite so easily, since the anxiety and concern for the individual there can be read differently than the subsumption and erasure of the individual by the ethical laws of the community or by some homogenous monolith of ethical norms. The anxiety that propels Kierkegaard's inquiry in *Fear and Trembling* is his anxiety about Abraham's anxiety, which would be Abraham's anxiety in the face of Isaac. Abraham then is anxious because he has to decide what to do, and it is terrifying who he should become through his acts, but it is Isaac's question "Father, where is the lamb?" that functions as a climactic moment for Kierkegaard. Isaac and the relation to the other person to whom the individual Abraham is bound and attached is crucial to the way that Kierkegaard sets up his inquiry into the meaning and possibility of faith. Every possible restaging of the journey of Abraham and Isaac ends with a metaphorical or allegorical interpretation of the scene through the image of the relation between a mother and the infant who is not to get the mother's breast any longer. And the emergence of the individual in relation to the absolute by the leap of faith happens not in the service of simply establishing Abraham as man of faith, but it is in fact crucial for Kierkegaard that Abraham's faith takes the form of believing in his getting back Isaac by virtue of the absurd. Abraham's becoming an individual and the question of faith cannot be separated from his concern for Isaac, his being addressed by Isaac. But Abraham does not and cannot speak his anxiety and so we can be only certain of his being addressed by Isaac, but we cannot be certain about anxiety being the heart of his silence. And perhaps this

possibility that Abraham might not have been anxious and our impossibility to attain certainty might be Kierkegaard's anxiety about Abraham's anxiety.

Levinas' criticism is not dispelled, because the story of Abraham is not the entire story of *Fear and Trembling*. Considering the rhetorical dimension makes it very clear that there is a reinscription and reinstantiation of the individual and individualizing that is not so easily brought back to a concern for the other person. This dimension is the fact that Abraham's anxiety is not the only anxiety propelling Kierkegaard's inquiry; Abraham's anxiety is mirrored, warped, and—and this is the question— perhaps consumed by the anxiety of the reader encountering Abraham's story, which after all prompts the inquiry into the story. This reader thus operates in and for the text as the horizon returning Abraham and Isaac to the question that Butler offered us as key to Kierkegaard, namely the individual's question "What relation can *I* have to faith?" The difference between Kierkegaard and Levinas then could be cast as indeed a question of the role of the ethical in subject formation and faith.

As noted above, Kierkegaard does not understand the ethical demand of Abraham's responsibility toward Isaac as a demand that is directly bound up with the commandment "You shall not kill," whereas in Levinas the ethical demand arrives as the divine commandment communicated through the face of the other. This means that in reading the story of Abraham and Isaac with Levinas, it seems that the two demands by which Abraham finds himself called to respond to cannot be staged as a conflict of addresses coming, in one case, from the finite and, in the other case, from the infinite realm. Rather, if God's commandment arrives and becomes meaningful only through the encounter with others, it seems that the ethical and the divine would be traversing each other.

So for Levinas the ethical and the religious appear to be inextricably bound up with each other. I would like to dwell on this problematic for a minute and consider what this intertwinement means, as it appears that the ethical emerges here precisely as theological ethics. Does this mean that the ethical and the religious eventually become indistinguishable? And what are the consequences, then, for the negotiation of ethics and politics? For the moment, I would like to suspend the suspicion that this means that ethical norms will turn out to be divine commandments instantiated in the order of a human community and hence render these norms incontestable. How precisely is it that the divine and the ethical traverse each other? Might it be possible

to understand the divine as entering the finite as the ethical, though perhaps remaining inassimilable to a framework of rational deliberation and enforcement, remaining powerless with regard to generalizable justificatory power?

The decision that Abraham is required to make between the two demands placed on him then means not a wrestling with deciding between ethical and divine. The framework for faith is being addressed and called to respond, faith thus emerges as a matter of responsibility and responding. But responding to God does not figure as opposed to relations to others; rather, faith as an adequate response to the infinite demand happens in relation to others, the relation of responsibility, where the infinite now becomes the infinite demand of the other. What then are the consequences for *theological* ethics, if we were to attempt to think about such a thing? How are theological ethics different from *ethics*, or is it that, as for Levinas, in the end all ethics is always already theological? Certainly the theological aspect, as presented here, is not simply a motivational aspect; the theological aspect has, in fact, been aligned with the imperative and normative demand, inexorable for the subject who is not prior to this demand. The normative force in Levinas is the inescapable claim on the subject; the I comes about as the one infinitely responsible for the other and at the same time as the one for whom no one can substitute. Thus, the normative force of the demand is impossible to separate or generalize beyond the perspective of the subject called to respond. It seems that for Levinas the primary ethical relationship is also inescapably theological, because the demand that the other imposes on the I is infinite, coming from elsewhere, *anarchic*, remaining inassimilable to reason, logic, universality, and systematicity—though factually always possible to neglect. Yet it is precisely due to the theologically anarchic character of the commandment "You shall not kill" that the general norm prohibiting murder cannot be directly justified and secured by the divine commandment. The divine commandment singles out and individualizes, and every individual will have to wrestle in solitude with this supreme kind of responsibility to respond.

Complicating this notion of theological ethics, one could argue that in Levinas perhaps in some sense all ethical relations emerge as theological insofar as the theological dimension is the infiniteness of the other's demand. Yet Abraham poses to us a problematic that might be theological in a slightly different way. The Levinasian scene presents us with a subject addressed by another, and while the face relates the

absolute prohibition to murder, it also, Levinas tells us, instills in the subject the temptation to desert and annihilate the other. But Abraham complicates the problematic insofar as the temptation to murder and desert Isaac is not really that which produces Abraham's anxiety in the face of the ethical demand not to kill Isaac. It is not the temptation to murder, but the *demand* to sacrifice Isaac—and this demand as *divine* and anarchic demand—that produces Abraham's anxiety and enables his leap of faith. In a Levinasian reading, one could suggest that Abraham faces two infinite, infinitely conflicting demands, but the conflict that emerges in the face of the demand to sacrifice Isaac might be cast as originary scene of theological ethics, of theological ethics within certain historically specific traditions. And here we now will return to the earlier claim of theology as irreducible to ethics, that theology can only be irreducible to ethics if life cannot be simply reduced and returned to God.

This irreducibility manifests itself in the story of Abraham precisely through the conflicting demands and the question, which demand to fulfill if only one can be fulfilled. Abraham's life and faith are not simply reducible to a logic of the divine commandment. The divine commandment cannot serve as backdrop; God himself emerges as the one who challenges and troubles the human, there is not *the one* divine demand that Abraham could simply obey. Rather, life becomes possible at a distance from and in a paradoxical relation to the divine. Human freedom emerges as a difficult freedom and can be freedom only because of the undecidability that produces anxiety and demands that the human subject wrestles with responsibility. Faith, then, can be understood as a possible effect of this wrestling, which is a wrestling with demands encountered through the encounter with other human beings, but which is also a wrestling with God. The question and decision how to respond single out, individualize—and for a theological consideration, this individualizing also means that the individual emerges in front of God, not only risking with regard to community and the ethical as the rationally justifiable, but undergoing a radical ungrounding. Yet this ungrounding is also what enables and reopens the demands for contestation; in fact, contestation emerges as an imperative. Faith, then, does not alleviate or free one from responsibility, but it is a mode of becoming in responsibility. The leap of faith remains always ungrounding, ungrounded, and an irresponsible leap into responsibility in the face of the precariousness of life.

As an act of affirmation, as a passionate affirmation in, and as a response to, the precariousness of our relation to another, faith is that which can emerge as the contingency of life is faced and affirmed. This affirmation, then, does not mean a distancing from ties to individuals, but rather in the mode of faith, it becomes possible to give oneself over to love, to the impossibility to secure, ground, or insure the life of the other and the love between us. We cannot ever be sure that the proper love for the infinite is not substituted by an improper cherishing of the finite. Nevertheless, if faith means to affirm love and life in this world in their contingency, then this experience in contingency might return us productively to the question of grace: "Human love requires the knowledge of grace, that what is given for us to love is not ours, and that its loss refers us to that which is the origin of all things finite, including ourselves" ("Kierkegaard" 386). Grace, or more specifically a certain *knowledge* of grace, seems to be emerging as that which allows for human love to be sustainable, to be livable. How precisely is grace framed? What strange kind of knowledge is this knowledge of grace? How is this knowledge bound up with faith and passion? This knowledge of grace comes to mean to know "that what is given for us to love is not ours," so grace would then be bound up with a notion of being given, of *gift* in the most radical sense, insofar as that which we are given to love is not ours, we did not deserve or earn it, we cannot possess and make that which we love ours, and yet to love means to accept the gift and become attached to that other beyond one's own control.

Grace also seems to relate to the question of the origin of us and all things finite, and through the loss of that which we love, transcendence seems to break open and the knowledge of grace seems to emerge. Grace, then, is not simply an alleviation of pain; grace turns out to be a tough gift, grace as happening through and in a relation to someone else. As it emerges, it seems to found and enable love, but grace as such cannot be extracted and defined. And the kind of "knowledge" that we can come to have of grace seems to be precisely the kind of "knowledge" that we can have of faith. The knowledge of the impossibility to know, a kind of knowledge that emerges only in and through a leap, in and through a certain self-dispossession that one undergoes in love and faith. A certitude that is radically uncertain, unstable, precarious, and continuously has to tussle with its own impossibility, but that nevertheless emerges as a kind of knowledge that continuously redirects us to the infinite only by and through redirecting us to this world, to the other person. Grace, then, cannot be brought about,

produced, as it were, but it breaks in, overwhelming from behind one's back. In other words, knowing grace comes to figure as a kind of experience, one's undergoing an overwhelming coming to realize that whatever is could very well be otherwise, that there is ultimately no reason why this particular human being is and why others are not, that human beings ultimately come and go out of existence, that there is higher logic neither to joy nor to suffering.

This kind of grace does not arrive without trembling, but what Butler's reading of Kierkegaard and the engagement with Levinas' reading of Kierkegaard offer is perhaps a reopening of subject formation and the intensity of this becoming towards its contingency as well as towards responsibility. Perhaps the offer that emerges is mobilizing the affirmation of the contingency of the finite realm as an act of faith through the pangs of weakening as well as receiving and reaffirming one's ties to the finite. Faith, then, does not mean an apolitical or antipolitical stance, but rather faith is bound up with the return to political and social issues—at least in a context of wrestling with Butler's thought, which cannot be separated from engagement with the question of political and social struggles. Faith and grace as affirmation of the precariousness of life then cannot be separated from enabling critique in the sense of an ungrounding, a detachment from the community and its laws without recourse to higher grounds.

Theological ethics might then emerge as an enterprise of great serenity and sobriety, but also as an ironic affair. Life cannot become coextensive with theory as much as life cannot be returned fully to God. Salvation might reemerge continuously as a temptation of salvation, as we have to wonder whether there is not a temptation to read subject formation as a vicious circle in the service of a desire to theorize bringing relief and to actually bring relief through this theorizing. But who would this "we" be, and whose temptation is emerging here? It seems as if there is indeed theology as a perspective in this scenario of subject formation, in the scenario of the daily experience that this world, this life are precisely not redeemed. This life, the experience of its being precarious and perishable, the experience of being implicated in a history of violence, deaths, and tears that seems to have no end, at best "challenges" us. But I would like to interrupt here the quick move to take these experiences as a jumping off point for deliberations on theodicy and salvation. Instead, we might come to ask whether redemption might figure differently than

salvation. Perhaps redemption could be an interruption that opens the horizon for a moment of hope for the possibility of forgiveness; perhaps redemption could be an interruption in the need for and desire of salvation—redemption as interruption, as a possibility of encountering the transience of the finite simply as transience, redemption as a moment of suspending the temptation to make sense, suspending inscribing a logic, suspending returning the contingency of life to frameworks of causality, means and ends.

This suspension might be figured as a leap of faith as an affirmation of precariousness and contingency. This means that faith and, more particularly, faith as a mode of becoming becomes a kind of mastery in the moment of the loss of authorship and mastery, giving over and letting go. In encountering transience and contingency, this kind of mastery is not one that a strong, self-sufficient subject brings about, but rather in the back of the dispossession, mastery emerges as mastery that takes hold of the subject rather than as mastery as an effect of the subject taking hold and control. This mastery, this leap of faith, happens through a self-dispossession in the face of the other, of the precariousness and contingency of life—the ungroundedness and groundlessness, the groundless coming and going out of existence—the *anarchic* life, in the sense of having no higher reason or principle that could ultimately justify or ground life; life's origin is a nonorigin, *anarche*, life of the creature as anarchic, life in the face of the anarchic. While, then, the attempts to think subject formation are not figuring subject formation as a merciless becoming, in the sense that the salvation of the subject becomes the *telos* in this story, this does also not mean that becoming and the violence of becoming are to be simply embraced, heralded, and celebrated. The difficulty to distinguish and decide between forms of violence we want to and come to oppose will always remain with us just as much as the necessity to distinguish and decide and just as much as the impossibility to ultimately account for distinguishing criteria. Theory is not life, theory shall not be life, theory cannot offer salvation, theory has to return us to the daily political struggles of life. But for theory to invigorate political contestation, theory must emerge at a distance from life, and at the same time, it has to be brought to its own limits in order not to offer false totalities and securities. In reading Butler, we might come to want to understand thinking about subject formation as motivated and invigorated constantly by precisely this impossibility to redeem becoming in this

world. And running up against this impossibility is to meet the limits of thinking life and of life itself, namely the precariousness of our lives.

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298

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List of Abbreviations

Works by Judith Butler

AL   *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (2002 Adorno Lectures)

BTM   *Bodies That Matter*

CHU   *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*

ES   *Excitable Speech*

GT   *Gender Trouble*

PL   *The Psychic Life of Power*

SD   *Subjects of Desire*

Other Works

DP   Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*

EN   Emmanuel Levinas. *Entre Nous*

FN   Paul Ricoeur. *Freedom and Nature*

FT   Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*

GM   Friedrich Nietzsche. *Zur Genealogie der Moral/*
          On the Genealogy of Morals

HS   Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality. Volume One*

ISA   Louis Althusser. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*

OA   Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*

OTB   Emmanuel Levinas. *Otherwise Than Being*

PhG   G. W. F. Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*

PhS   G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*

SUD   Søren Kierkegaard. *Sickness unto Death*

TI   Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*

TN   Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*

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